

THE

LONDON READER

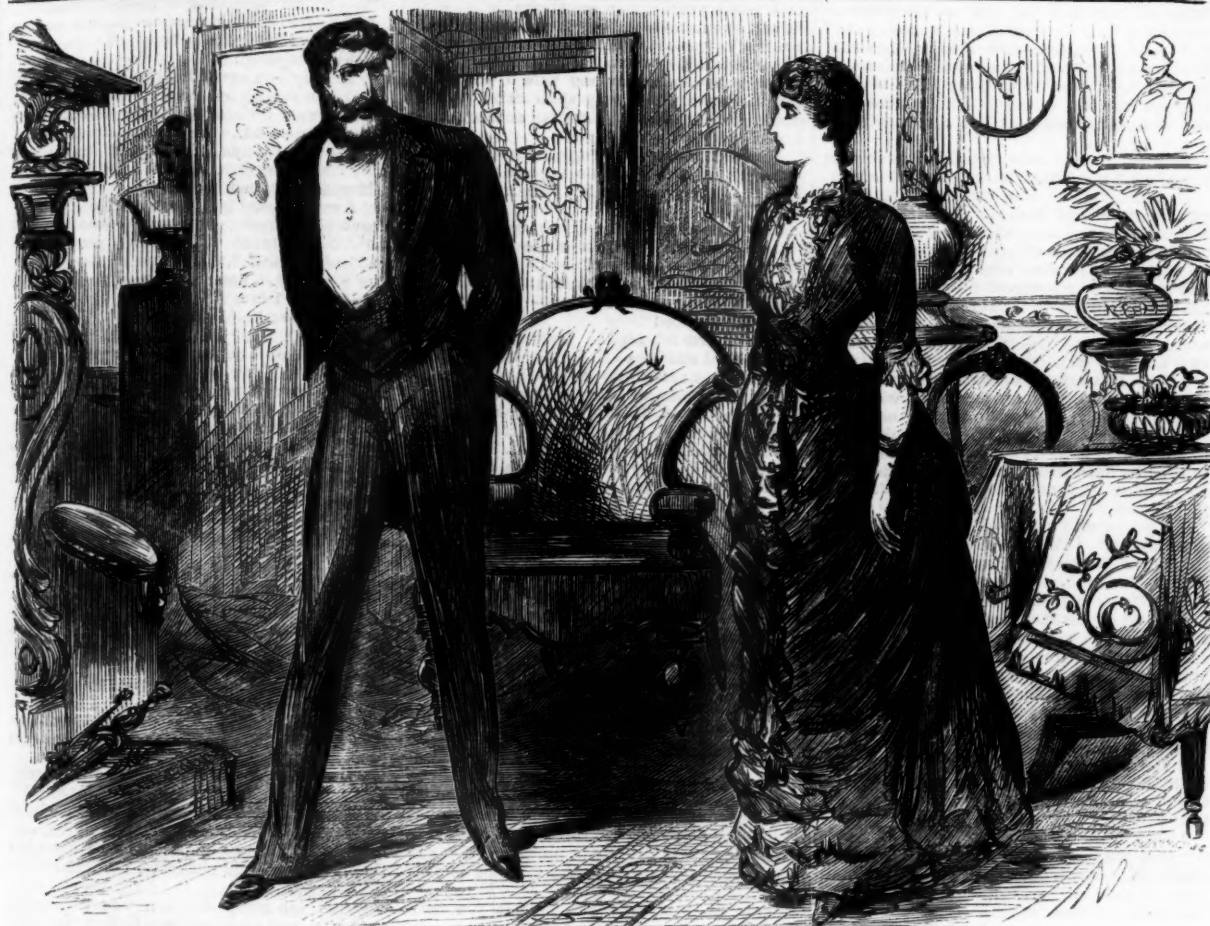
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No. 1343.—VOL. LII.]

FOR THE WEEK ENDING JANUARY 26, 1889.

[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



"DO NOT TEMPT ME TOO FAR," SHE SAID, BITTERLY. "REMEMBER, NO HUMAN POWER CAN COMPEL ME TO DO THIS THING!"

EILEEN'S ROMANCE.

CHAPTER VIII.

EILEEN DESMOND stood motionless—a strange terror at her heart, a vague, inexplicable dread of what was to come next. Though eighteen, there were many things in which she was ignorant as a child.

Although she had grown up motherless and unprotected in a French town, she was yet more ignorant of the ways of the world than many carefully-guarded English girls.

She had had no friends of her own age to confide to her their love affairs; she had read but few novels; and so it seemed to her a thing unheard of that Henry Marsden, her father's creditor, should really be asking her to marry him!

She understood Mrs. Venn's warning now. A veil seemed to fall from her eyes, and she knew the old woman had foreseen this. With despair the poor child remembered she had never shamed Mr. Marsden, but had accepted

his company and conversation, even going out of her way to study his amusement, since she looked on him, not only as a guest, but as one to whom they owed a heavy debt.

She had never thought of such a thing as his caring for her like this, but if it had been in his mind all along he might well say she had given him encouragement.

And there was no one to help her. With desperate search the poor child called over in her mind the few people she knew, and reflected that one and all would be powerless or unwilling to aid her.

Maudie was out of the question; she would be glad of anything which removed her sister from Desmondville. Lord Desmond himself, as poor little Eileen felt, would be a very broken reed on which to lean. The father who had reproached her bitterly for refusing to beg of her friend to pay his debts would not be likely to object to any sacrifice of her own which freed him from them.

Basil? Alas, how could Basil help her? It was not in his power to marry her; besides, she was a minor, and for nearly three years was under her father's rule. Lady May

seemed a more likely prop, but she was Basil's cousin, and that fact made it well-nigh impossible for her to interfere.

Henry Marsden watched the rapid changes which passed over the fair, girlish face, and said at last,—

"Will you not answer me? Are you angry at my presumption? Do you think a self-made man audacious to aspire to the hand of the Honourable Miss Desmond?"

Eileen found her voice.

"You know I am not so base!" cried the poor girl, passionately. "You are my father's creditor. You have honourably paid your way and risen in the world; we have nothing but an empty title, a name stained with debt. How could I think you presumptuous for being willing to marry such an one?"

"You did not answer me. You looked amazed, as though I were so far removed from you that it was impossible to think of me as a lover."

"I was amazed, but not for that reason. You were my father's friend—you knew my mother, who died when I was a baby. How should I dream that you would care for me—

a child of eighteen? Besides," and she never faltered, for truth was Eileen's nature, "knowing my own heart was given away how could I think of anyone else wanting it?"

Henry Marsden watched her gravely. A spasm of pain crossed his face at her last words; for one moment good and evil struggled for dominion over him. She was his dead-love's child. Why, his better self whispered, should he try to spoil her life by uniting her fresh youth to his passion-stained middle age? Why not leave her free, and use his influence with her father to smooth her chosen path? But evil triumphed with the whisper that Eileen was the daughter, also, of the man who had wronged him. He whose life had been blighted by her mother's faithlessness had surely a better right to her than any other man?

Besides, she was so young. The attachment she alluded to could be but a passing fancy.

He loved her so. She was in all things the picture of his lost darling. Affection such as his must surely triumph in time!

The struggle was sharp but brief, and evil triumphed. The man who for nineteen years had never done an unselfish action preferred his own happiness to that of the girl he loved.

"You have never seemed to dislike me," he argued, passionately. "From the moment of our meeting you have never avoided my society. You had no right to lure me on step by step, and then send me away with this tale of your engagement to another man."

"I did not dislike you," faltered Eileen. "I looked on you as one whom my father had injured by borrowing money he could not pay. I wanted to show my gratitude to you for your forbearance."

"A pretty way of showing it," said Marsden roughly. "To make me care for you, and then thrust me aside! But no, I acquit you there. You did not make me care. I lost my heart the first hour I saw you, when you pleaded to me for mercy on your father, and then I had the wish to make you mine, and soothe all your sorrows. When I promised you I would never ask Lord Desmond for anything he could not give me, even then I was thinking of one day when I should sue to him for his daughter's hand!"

Eileen started in alarm.

"You will not tell him?" she pleaded. "Oh, Mr. Marsden, if you have any kindness, any pity in your nature, do not tell my father that you want to marry me!"

"Why not?"

"Can you ask? You know him!" Here she shuddered, poor child, as she recollected all that her knowledge meant. "You must see the temptation to him!"

"I think I see it more clearly than you do."

She shook her head.

"That is impossible. I know his circumstances so well that I can see the utter impossibility of his finding a thousand pounds to pay your claim. He is an old man, and he would fain live in peace and honour in his father's house. I can understand perfectly, that if his freedom could be purchased by my becoming your wife, he would be eager for that union."

"It is time to speak plainly, and have done with shame," said Marsden, bitterly. "Remember, please, you forced the truth from me. Had you only yielded to my wishes you should never have heard the story. Your father never borrowed money from me. We were not on terms which would have justified it. More than eighteen years ago, knowing every circumstance of my history, and the exact sum I had saved by honest toil, such as he would never have stooped to, he drew a cheque for the whole amount; forged my signature, and presented it at the bank. But for my forbearance the Honourable Noel Desmond would have stood in a felon's dock on the charge of forgery. He may stand there yet! sent to that fate, in his old age, by the hand of his favourite child!"

Eileen looked into Marsden's face with eyes which might have melted a heart of stone.

"And you can threaten me thus! You who profess to love me!"

"I do love you," he answered, gravely, "with all my heart and all my strength. Only be my wife, and no shadow of blame shall ever rest on your father's name. I have saved money; of late years whatever I have touched has prospered. I can make a handsome settlement on you, and provide a home worthy even of your sweet face; but I am only mortal. I will do all this for you. I will even make your father an allowance, so that he can live more as befits his rank, but I will never give you up willingly to another man. If you discard my love it will turn to hatred; if you refuse to become my wife I will take care the man you marry shall drink to the dregs the disgrace that must fall on a convict's son-in-law!"

She did not cry, her eyes were dry and burning; she uttered no appeal of mercy. Perhaps, poor child, she felt it would be useless.

She stood there with a dumb, voiceless pain stamped on her face, as some fair flower smitten by the east wind.

"And this is love!" she said at last, slowly, and with—oh! such bitterness—"Heaven help me; this is love!"

"True love!" replied Marsden. "Ready to suffer all and bear all, for the object of its passion; but ready also to wreak due vengeance on any man who steps in between."

"Then," said Eileen, sadly, "love is not worth having!"

"You talk like a foolish child," returned Marsden, petulantly. "Who is this man for whom you fancy you care? What can he give you more than I? If you are engaged to him why does he leave you unclaimed, unacknowledged?"

"He is a gentleman," replied Eileen, with a bitter stress upon the word, "poor enough in this world's goods, but with a heart as true as steel. He would not stoop, Mr. Marsden, to threaten a defenceless girl any more than he would tempt another man's fiancée to break her word."

"Yet gentlemen have been known to do such things."

"Not if they are really worthy the name!"

"Perhaps you think I am not a gentleman?"

"I do not know. I have never seen the world; but I should say no gentleman would threaten any defenceless creature in his power, or bribe any soul he professed to care for into deceit."

"You evade my questions. Who is this man who has come between us. If you are engaged to him, why has he left you here alone?"

"I deny your right to ask me; but you may have my answer. The man I love is a soldier, who serves his Queen and country. He will not be able to marry till three years' time; and when he told my father of our engagement, Lord Desmond refused his consent. When my lover was in a position to marry he could come again. Till then his lordship declined to recognise any engagement. We were not to correspond even, and all meetings were forbidden."

"And he left you?"

"He had no choice. He knew I should be true to him; that whether he returned in three years' time or ten he would find me faithful!"

"And you actually meant to wait for him? With your beauty would you be content to waste your youth in this desolate old castle waiting for a man who may forget you in a few months?"

Eileen shook her head.

"I not only meant to wait, but I shall do so. He will not forget me. He may not be rich, Mr. Marsden, but we can trust each other."

"I suppose he comes of a good family? It seems a little hard on his relations that his future father-in-law should be a convict!"

Eileen winced.

"You could not do it," she said, pitifully.

"You could not be so cruel. After eighteen years' oblivion how could you rake up the secrets of the past?"

"I shall do it if you drive me to the step. You can know little of a man's love if you think I would have pity when I know that that pity would only smooth my rival's path. No, Eileen, it will be your hand, not mine, that sends Lord Desmond to his punishment, and stain his old name with guilt. You hold your father's fate in your hands. Only be my wife, and he shall live respected, honoured. I will help him in every way. Refuse, and he stands in a felon's dock!"

Eileen hesitated.

"You say you are rich," she began, timidly, "and you want a beautiful wife. Why don't you marry my sister? Maude is ten times prettier than I am. No one ever looks at me when she is shy, and she leaves pomp and show. Why not marry her, and leave me free?"

Marsden laughed hoarsely.

"A man's heart is not a shuttlecock, to be tossed about from one woman to another. If I had been content with a wife, provided she was only beautiful, I need not have waited till now to marry. Your sister may be charming, but it is *you* I love!"

"If you can call it love!"

"It is love!" he returned, decidedly. "Truer love, I dare say, than your young soldier feels. You say he comes of a noble family; then you may be pretty sure he will release you from your engagement" the moment he hears of your father's disgrace.

They had been standing all this time. Faint, and overwrought by excitement, Eileen leaned wearily against a tree in the grand old avenue. The picture of youth and innocence she looked, standing there in her soft, gray gown—a world of pain and sorrow shining in her beautiful eyes.

"Will you give me time?" she said, in a strange, far-off sort of voice. "I feel so tired, so utterly bewildered, I cannot think of things as I ought. Will you give me time before you—do anything?"

He thought she was yielding.

"I will give you till the end of this year before I take any steps against Lord Desmond. I shall speak to him of my wedding at once. It may be that his entreaties will prevail on you to have pity on himself and me!"

"Until the end of this year I am safe. You really mean it? You promise it to me?"

"I will swear it to you if you like. Until the first of January I shall take no steps to bring your father's guilt home to him; but then, if you remain obdurate, I will not wait a single day."

"And you really desire a wife who would not love you—whose one feeling for you would be the scorn of a wounded heart?"

"A captive bird, does not love its owner at first," he returned, coolly, "but it soon learns it is less so. Never fear, when you are mine, but what I shall teach you to love me."

"Never!"

"You are very certain."

"I am so certain," said Eileen, "that I feel if anything forced me to yield and to become your wife I should hate you! The very touch of your hand, the mere sound of your voice, would be odious to me."

"I will risk that!"

Not another word passed between them. Eileen went straight upstairs to her own room. Mr. Marsden caught the sound of the gong, and went into lunch.

Tony never lingered at this meal when once the dishes were on the table. As soon as he had retreated the guest turned to Lord Desmond.

"I told you the night I came that before I left your house I would give you the terms on which I would not only keep your secret to my dying day, but resign to you the papers which prove my case. I am a man of my word. I am not disposed to leave Desmondville at present, but I am ready to tell you my conditions at once."

"You know they will be fulfilled if human

will can bring it about," said Noel Desmond, eagerly; "but remember, please, you are dealing with an impoverished man, who has neither wealthy friends nor any means of raising money to meet your claims."

"I do not ask you for a penny piece, and you will need no friend's assistance to meet my views. Indeed, I may propose to increase your income of two or three odd hundreds if you carry out my wishes. Give me your daughter, Eileen, and I swear to you I will do my best to make her happy!"

Not a muscle of Lord Desmond's face changed. He had in some sort been prepared. Not that he had expected Henry Marsden to propose for his daughter, but he had always felt that if he obtained good terms from his enemy they would be won by means of this child, who was his dead wife's image. He knew that Marsden had loved Eileen's mother with a wondrous love, and he had always eagerly fancied Eileen, from her great resemblance to the dead, might have some power to soften the heart of the practical man of the world.

"Do you know that she has not a penny, and never will have?" he demanded.

"Perfectly! I am willing to settle two thousand a year on her, and I can form an establishment for her worthy a peer's daughter. My life is insured for fifty thousand pounds, and of course I should make a will in her favour. I have not a relation in the world; and though I do not come of a high family I believe my wife would have the entrée into the best society. If Eileen marries me you shall always be a welcome guest at our house, and I am quite willing to do a brother's part in providing your eldest girl with a suitable parti."

It was the very same room in which Noel Desmond had listened, not two months ago, to Basil Courtenay's wooing. What a contrast between the suitors, but not greater than in their reception!

"I am delighted," said Lord Desmond, effusively. "Perfectly charmed. I am sure you will make my child a good husband. You are old enough to have sown your wild oats, and besides the pecuniary prospect, which is all I could wish for Eileen, there seems something of poetical justice in her atoning for the wound her mother inflicted long ago!"

"Don't tell her that!" said Marsden, irritably. "She is already inclined to think of me as Methusalem! Don't let her know I was ever engaged to her mother."

"Certainly not, if it is against your wishes. I should think I had better send for Maude," went on Lord Desmond in his most gracious manner. "I believe custom does not approve of any engaged pair residing under the same roof without a chaperon."

"Send for Miss Desmond by all means if you think she will take a sensible view of the matter; but at present things are at a dead lock—Eileen has refused me!"

Noel Desmond's face blanched.

"She is a foolish child, who does not know her own mind. You must not take her answer as final. For my sake give her time."

Marsden smiled bitterly.

"She seemed to know her mind pretty thoroughly, but I would not take her answer as final. I insisted on her taking time, not for your sake, but my own. I could not bear the idea of losing her. I told her all hung on her decision, and gave her till the end of the year to make up her mind. Lord Desmond, I advise you, if you have any fatherly authority, use it. If I am not your accepted son-in-law by the first of next January I shall put the law in motion."

Lord Desmond looked quite cheerful.

"Of course Eileen will hear reason?"

"She informed me she cared for someone else."

"What nonsense!" said the father, contemptuously. "Why, she hardly knew him a month, and I refused my consent! Not that

anything would have come of it in any case, for he was poor and proud."

"Who was it?"

"Sir Bryan's heir."

"There is nothing but entanglements. Why, unless he marries a wife with a large fortune he will have to join his father in cutting off the entail, and then the estate will go to the hammer. Young people have no feeling, no consideration," went on Lord Desmond, as though he had ever shown a particle of either.

"Both Mr. Courtenay and Eileen know their marriage would break his father's heart and reduce an ancient family to ruin, and yet they were selfish enough to fall in love."

"I am sorry it is Courtenay," observed Henry Marsden, slowly. "I have met him, and he struck me as a man likely to be very obstinate in anything he took to heart."

"He is as obstinate as a mule, but he can't marry Eileen for three years without my consent—which he will never have—so you may put him out of the question. She is a good girl, and when she is once your wife this passing attachment will soon be forgotten."

"You forget one thing, or else you purposely ignore it," struck in the lover. "We need not think of Mr. Courtenay—his consent will not be asked. We need not consider the strength of your daughter's attachment to him. I am willing to risk that; but how is Eileen to be persuaded to become my wife?"

Lord Desmond looked sanctimonious, raised his eyes piously to Heaven—a gesture, mark you, almost peculiar to those who studiously avoid all reference to Heaven in their lives—and replied,—

"The duty, Mr. Marsden, will surely prevail. She owes her life—her being to me. Through eighteen years I have lavished tenderness and care on her. She has always been my favourite child. Surely she cannot refuse the first thing I have ever required of her?"

Marsden looked thoughtfully into the fire.

"Understand one thing, I am thoroughly in earnest. If you play me false in this matter you know what you have to expect."

"I am not likely to play you false. Apart from—from what we both know of—I should be glad to see Eileen married. Maude has a trifle—a very small one—of her own, but her sister at my death is penniless."

"Why did you refuse your consent to Mr. Courtenay?" inquired Marsden. "What objection had you to him?"

"I have never felt easy about the past," confessed Lord Desmond. "Though you had kept quiet so long I always fancied I should hear more of you. I felt, if disgrace came, Courtenay must break with Eileen; or if it came after their marriage, the shadow would just break my child's heart, since the Courtenays are so proud—the stigma would be a misery to them—and, withal, so poor that they could not bury it in display. I told Basil Courtenay something very near the truth. That there had been such a stir at the time of my own second marriage many people would consider Eileen beneath him in birth, and that I would prefer her to marry a man whose wife's descent need not appear in print, or else one so rich and distinguished as to be able to hold his own against all criticism."

"You had no other reason?"

"I always felt Eileen was my best shield against you. I never dreamed of your marrying her, but I did think you would hesitate to strike your blow if you knew it must recoil on your dead love's child."

"I am less pitiful than you supposed," said Marsden, bitterly. "If she is not to be mine I shall strike my blow without remorse, for I shall know in striking it I at least separate her from my rival."

He rose then and left the room. Noel Desmond bowed his head on his hands and tried to think. On the one hand he was relieved of a nightmare. He never doubted Eileen's consent, and he saw himself freed from Marsden's yoke for ever, his favourite child provided for, his old age propped up by

a wealthy son-in-law; but there was a reverse side to the picture. Weak, selfish, erring and sinful as this man had been, he yet possessed some heart. He had loved Eileen's mother as fondly as such a nature can love, and he knew her whole heart would have revolted from this sacrifice of her child. Then, too, Eileen was her mother's image in thoughts and feeling as well as in face, while, strange to say, she possessed stronger principle and a sterner sense of judgment.

"I could not help it," young Mrs. Desmond had said, looking into her husband's face, and speaking of the truth she had broken. "I know I have been false to him, but would not it have been false to have married him loving you with my whole heart? Besides, Noel, I could not live without you, for my life lives in my love."

She had been little older than Eileen when she said this. How if Eileen felt the same?—and her case was more painful.

Mrs. Desmond had had to choose between love and right, but love and right were both on Eileen's side. She would be asked to break her word; to give up the man she loved; to cover herself with remorse, and perhaps break an honest heart, and for what? That her father's sin, committed before she was born, might be hidden from the world.

Noel Desmond had exacted sacrifices all his life from those who would make them, and yet, in the end, behaved better to those who refused.

He loved Eileen ten times more than Maude. Eileen from infancy had studied him in all things. Maude, absent from him the best part of her life, and calmly taking her own way when their wills came in contact, had yet far more power over him than Eileen.

He simply would not have dared to dictate to his first-born whom she should marry, and yet he was ready to order Eileen to give up her love-dream, and marry a man old enough to be her father at his bidding!

But shame was not quite dead within him. He did shrink from meeting his pure-hearted child now she knew the secret of his life. Maude, he knew, had long despised him for his poverty and ill-success. Women like her are prone to despise those who fail in the world's struggle, but Eileen loved and trusted him.

And she knew what he had done—that he was as morally guilty as convicts serving their ten years of penal servitude. She knew all this. How should he face her again?

Tony came in presently to remove the lunch, and was struck with his master's face; it seemed so white and sad.

His wife, who went upstairs soon after with a cup of tea for her favourite, told Eileen they could not think what ailed his lordship, he seemed "upset above a bit."

Eileen knew. She stirred restlessly on her bed, and remembered her father's lot was harder than hers. She might be the one called on to make the sacrifice, but his was the sin that had made it necessary—if it was necessary.

Eileen's whole mind was full of searchings for some middle path, but as yet she had found none, and only the two cruel alternatives stared her in the face—ruin and disgrace for her father, or misery and falsehood for herself; and yet, even in her agony, the news of his depression roused her. She forced herself to swallow a little food, and asked the housekeeper,—

"Where is Mr. Marsden?"

"He's driven over to Whitby, Miss Eileen. He won't be back till late, I believe."

Mrs. Ball looked searchingly at her young lady.

Eileen, with two deep pink spots on her cheeks, remembered the last time they had spoken together of Henry Marsden.

"Ball, I have often meant to ask you. Is this Mr. Marsden the man my grandfather was so angry with?"

Ball nodded.

"The very same, Miss Eileen."

"You said then he was a bad man, he—"

"I said what I thought, my dear Miss Eileen. The old master was very bitter against him, but maybe he's changed. Tony says he's a very pleasant-spoken gentleman, and he's no trouble in the house. Sure, Miss Eileen, you're never going to get up? Why, you look like fit for nothing but bed!"

But Eileen had dragged herself to her feet, and now stood beside the glass, smoothing her sunny hair.

She trembled as one with the ague, and looked very wan and ill, but she did not falter in her purpose.

"I am going downstairs to papa, Ball. You know I seldom get a chance to talk to him alone now Mr. Marsden is staying here."

It seemed to Lord Desmond his wife herself who entered the library. Eileen looked more like her mother even than usual in her grief.

She spoke no word of reproach, uttered no passionate lamentation; she only crept wearily up to his side, and laid one little white hand upon his shoulder.

There is always something pitiful when the natural relations of life are reversed; when the wife is the prop on which the husband leans; or the sister the mainstay of a weak, vacillating brother; but it is sadder yet when a poor girl, hardly out of childhood, has to be the moral support of a father for whom she must feel shame.

Love can survive everything. It is only the very young, or the people utterly unversed in suffering, who tell us love dies when respect and faith are gone. Love, that is, woman's love—be it wife's, mother's, sister's—lives on, and only perishes with life itself; but its very nature, its very essence, is changed. It is love still; but its crown, its joy, its radiancy, all these are gone, and there remains only that part of love which suffers for and with its object, that part of love which, like the charity of the Bible, is, indeed, long suffering.

And yet it was love still. It loses nothing of its intensity, though all its brightness may be gone. There is, indeed, to me something more touching in the love that has survived hope, faith, illusions, happiness, than in the new, untried sentiment which glitters bright and radiant as a bride's wedding-ring.

A girl's glad love for her bridegroom is beautiful. He is her hero, from whom she expects great things—whom she believes capable of grand actions; but, as more touching yet to my mind, is the love of the wife who has learned to know that marriage is not always a state of paradise, and that her hero is only a man like other men, whose love has survived sorrow, time, and disappointment, and yet endureth. Pure gold is tested in the fire, and true love is tried in the furnace.

"Papa!"

Lord Desmond looked up at the white, wan face, and his heart failed him. If but the mere knowledge of his sin could change her thus in a few hours, how would she bear the burden of the secret all her life?

"I know everything," said Eileen, gently laying her cheek close to his. "Oh, how you must have have suffered—how hard it must have been to have such a care pressing on you all these years!"

Really he had been very little troubled with remorse, save when in fear of Marsden's proceeding to extremities. Lord Desmond had taken things very easily, and very literally obeyed the poet's injunction to "let the dead past bury its dead"; there was no need to tell this to his daughter.

"Your mother was dying at the time," he said, brokenly, "dying literally of hardships. I had not a sovereign, Eileen—no friend of whom I could borrow. It was for her sake I did it; and I never touched the money after all—the cheque was not paid."

"Did she know?"

The knowledge had killed her; but Lord Desmond saw no occasion to tell this to her child.

"If she had she would never have turned from me, Eileen. She loved me too well for

that. You young people are hard judges and do understand temptation. She would have felt for me!"

"I feel for you, papa," said Eileen gently. "I want to ask you one or two things about it, if you don't mind!"

"I am at your mercy, Eileen," said Lord Desmond, in a deeply-injured tone. "I have fallen low enough to deserve my own child should condemn me!"

"I do not condemn you, dear; but—has Mr. Marsden told you what he said to me?"

"Yes! Oh, child! have mercy on yourself and me!"

But Eileen waved that part of the question. She was wonderfully calm and collected. One would have said years must have passed over her head since those happy, childish days at Boulogne.

"Does anyone know it besides Mr. Marsden?"

No need to explain the "it." Lord Desmond understood her meaning, and winced.

"One other person; but he will be silent; besides, no one but Marsden has proofs. I have met the other man since I came to England, and he went out of his way to assure me he should never seek to harm me."

"Who was it?"

"Mr. Goldsmith."

"Ah!" and she gave a sigh of relief. "You may trust him. He will be as true as steel. There was no one else?"

"I have sometimes fancied that woman at the South Lodge had a suspicion. She can know nothing positively; but it seems she impressed my father with the belief she held some secret respecting me."

"I am not afraid of Mrs. Venn. Now, papa, I have nearly finished, only tell me this. Can Mr. Marsden really do what he threatens?"

"Of course he can!"

"I thought, perhaps, the time that had passed—more than eighteen years—would make a difference!"

Lord Desmond shook his head.

"No time makes any difference in criminal cases. Besides, he could declare that till I came back to England he was unable to find me. He has the proofs still in his possession, and Mr. Goldsmith could not refuse to give evidence if summoned as a witness."

"Then you really are at his mercy?"

"No; I am at yours. I am an old man, Eileen, and my future lies in your hand. If you can be easy picturing me in a felon's cell, ending my life a convict, then refuse Mr. Marsden!"

"You are cruel!"

"I do not mean to be. Marsden worships you. He is not an old man—only forty-two—and he has already made a large fortune. Though not of noble birth he comes of a very respectable family. Apart from his claim on us, I should be quite content with him as a son-in-law, for I know he would give you a home worthy of your birth."

"Don't," came from the girl's trembling lips, with a faint moaning cry, like some wounded animal utters when in pain.

"Don't! If I sell myself I do it for your sake—my price your freedom. Don't talk to me of the benefit I shall receive for myself. You must know I would rather be clad in sackcloth, and eat bread and water all my days, than marry a man who can demand such a sacrifice; but if I do it for you don't try to make me like my captivity by reminding me the chains will be gilded ones!"

"If you are thinking of young Courtenay put him out of your head," said Lord Desmond, hotly. "In his position he could not marry a convict's daughter. He might remain single all his days from a quixotic sense of honour, but he could not marry you if I were in penal servitude. He simply could not!"

"Do you think I would let him?" cried Eileen, passionately. "Don't you know I would give my life for him? How can you believe I would cast a blight upon his future

by letting him wed a wife whose dowry was shame?"

"I cannot help your taunts," said her father, in a whining tone. "I know I am at your mercy."

"I did not mean to reproach you—only you must keep that name out of your conversation. Thank Heaven, he is free! No formal promise binds him to me. The shadow of disgrace, if it falls, need not rest on him!"

"I wish it was Maude Marsden wanted," cried Lord Desmond, peevishly. "She has twice your sense, and would see the thing in a proper light, like a dutiful daughter."

"Do not let us quarrel," said Eileen, faintly. "Of course I know Maude would see the advantages of marrying a rich man. You need not tell me that, and I wish with all my heart she had been at home during Mr. Marsden's visit; but I am afraid it is too late for him to change now."

"Of course it is."

"I have some time," said Eileen, in her weary, tired voice, "some weeks yet. Surely, till I have decided, things can go on as usual. You need not be angry with me. I suppose Mr. Marsden will stay on?"

"He leaves on January first, either to make preparations for his wedding, or to take steps for sending me to prison!"

Eileen shuddered.

"It is more than a month off, papa. My head feels on fire. I seem almost distracted. At least let me have grace. I will promise you to meet Mr. Marsden every day, and be as courteous to him as I can. Only do not let this respite left me be tortured by your anger. It seems to me like the end of my life. At least let it be peace."

"I never heard of such selfishness!"

"Why? how?"

"You forget," said Lord Desmond, impressively, "the 'respite,' as you term it, is a time of agony for me; every day that passes with your consent unspoken brings the prospect of penal servitude closer to me. You ask that you may be left 'in peace.' Pray what is to be my state, exposed to the torments of suspense?"

It was a cruel question. The girl was well-nigh exhausted with all she had undergone that day, and might well have been spared this last taunt, but men like Noel Lord Desmond are not given to be over-pitiful of their fellow-creatures.

Perhaps his heartless jeer was in the end beneficial to his daughter. It raised her to the recollection that she, too, had her claims, that no human creature in this world is a mere chattel at the disposal of another. She was his child, and the child of a gentle, clinging mother, but she had the blood of a proud old family in her veins.

A century before the Desmonds had been famous for their spirit and their courage. It must have been some daring inherited from a by-gone age which came to Eileen's help now. Drawing herself up to her full height she looked full at the man before her—the father bound by natural laws to protect her, and yet who seemed her deadliest foe, and for once answered him as he deserved.

"Do not tempt me too far," she said, bitterly. "Remember no human power of yours or any man's can compel me to do this thing! If I sell myself I do it of my own free will to save you from a degrading punishment. If you torture me you gain nothing, for you only make me realise how little you deserve my sacrifice!"

Lord Desmond was spell-bound. He changed his role at once. From the indignant outraged parent he became the piteous, broken-down suppliant.

"And she can speak to me like this, the child of my old age? It is time, indeed, I were dead when my own daughter wishes me out of her way!"

"I never wished that," said Eileen, slowly. "I ask but two things, freedom from persecution, and that Basil Courtenay's name is not mentioned in my presence."

"You shall have your own way, but—"

He was interrupted by the sound of a carriage dashing up the avenue—an unusual sound in these days, for now the Court was shut up very few visitors came to call at Desmondville.

"It is Mr. Marsden," said Eileen, coolly. "I suppose he changed his mind, for Ball said he meant to sleep at Whitby. I am going to my own room, papa, for I do not care to meet him again to-day."

But as she crossed the entrance hall the door stood wide open, and she saw at once she was mistaken.

Mr. Marsden had not returned from Whitby, for Tony was talking rapidly and with far more show of welcome than he would have bestowed on the guest.

Eileen waited in surprise to see the cause of the commotion. Only a moment's suspense, and a slight, graceful figure came up the terrace steps, clad in a long, sealskin coat and with a coquettish toque upon her dark hair.

Eileen's heart stood still. Five minutes before she would have said nothing in the world would have increased her misery; she knew better now!

Maude Desmond advanced to greet her with a pretty show of affection, and the last gleam of hope died out of Eileen's heart; for even more than the man who was seeking to marry her against her will did she fear and shrink from the lovely, dazzling creature who was her half-sister; whose arrival at Boulogne one little year before had been, the poor child often sadly thought, the beginning of all her sorrows.

(To be continued.)

A DESPERATE DEED.

—10—

CHAPTER XXXIX.—(continued.)

THEY had made their way on down the corridor. Now he pushed open the door of the deserted breakfast-room, motioned her to a seat.

"Oh, I can't wait. I have a message for mamma!"

"Of importance?"

"I think not."

"Then it can wait."

What a masterful air! And still, strangely enough, she did not resent it.

She crossed the threshold.

"Please hurry!" she said.

He closed the door—faced her. His dashing, handsome, dark-browed face was ominously set, ominously grave.

"I shall not detain you. There is just one question I wish to ask you."

How solemn he was!

"Don't begin that way!" she implored. "That is what Aunt Clara said a few minutes ago, when she captured me. She just wished to ask me if lobster salad was a fitting relish for ice-cream."

In spite of himself, Lionel laughed. But suddenly he grew serious.

"My question is not one of internal economy," he asserted, with a fitting smile. "It is a matter of life and death—to me. Are you going to marry Sir Geoffrey Damyn?"

She took a step backward.

"Sir Geoffrey Damyn?" she cried.

"Yes," he said.

From afar came to them the tremulous cadence of the music.

Lord Romaine's daughter drew herself up with an air graceful as imperious.

"If Sir Geoffrey Damyn should do me the honour to ask me such a question, I would answer him!"

The quiet, icy words were a downright shock.

Curzon flashed all over his olive-skinned, sensitive face.

He bowed.

"A merited rebuke, I admit. Now grant me the courtesy you boast you would grant your father's guest—an answer. Will you be my wife?"

Such a cold wooing! Cold because of the very greatness of his love; but she was too young to understand that.

Perhaps he felt with the lover of Mrs. Browning's passionate poem:

"For as frost intense will burn you,
Her cold scorning scorched my brow."

Her all-demanding woman's nature rose in arms.

But she must not show pique. That would be childish!

So, though her being was filled with the pleasure of his presence, his nearness, the knowledge of his love, she swept him a grateful courtesy, and gave him the answer he craved in the line of an old song:

"I'm o'er young to marry yet!" she said.

His teeth closed on his nether lip.

"That means no, I suppose."

The words were half inquiry, half assertion.

She moved toward the door, all her dainty draperies glistening in the lamplight. She glanced back.

The dear boy! How handsome and sad and lonely he did look!

But the contrariety which masters every woman at times cast out that blessed pity which is kin to love.

"You must suppose—what you please!"

She laid her hand on the knob.

"Wait!"

He sprang after her.

She turned, with a cold surprise.

"Well?"

Oh, if she only were not so lovely! he told himself, with a wrathfulness which was half worship—not so girlishly, innocently, aggravatingly lovely.

He found it hard work to utter the harsh words, but at last they were said:

"If you are not going to marry Damyn, why do you give him your flowers? Why do you let him kiss you?"

"Let him kiss me!"

Was it her voice—her happy, silvery voice—which echoed the words? It was faint with sudden pain.

Neither spoke. But the sound of the waltz came to them piercingly shrill—discordant it seemed.

"I think," she said, slowly, "you should apologise."

She was very white.

"I saw you offer him a flower," he replied, doggedly.

Why had he wounded her when he loved her so? Well, it was said now!

"That is true. I am not accountable for that to you."

He did not speak.

"It is your other accusation!"

There was not a vestige of its rose bloom in the lovely, lifted face. The violet eyes were sparkling superbly.

But he still said nothing.

"I did not let him kiss me," scornfully. "I am not defending myself—remember that. But it was all a trick. You know it. Why—why," with a wretched, shaky little laugh. "I would no more allow him to kiss me than—than I would you!"

That was a blow. But he recovered himself.

He bowed.

"Then poor Damyn's chances are very slender. But believe me," he lifted his head and met her glance defiantly, with eyes as sombre and brilliant as her own—"believe me, I am not conquered! I shall do my best to make them more slender still. By right of love you are mine, Iva, play off on me all the pretty, childish airs you may. And I will have you—in spite of him, in spite of you! Sir Geoffrey Damyn must stand aside!"

"Must?"

He was sufficiently masterful, fervent, passionate now. His handsome hazel eyes looked positively black.

"Yes," he answered, "must!"

CHAPTER XL.

LADY IVA opened the door. She passed over the threshold, into the hall.

Half way up she came on the Countess. The latter was the centre of a knot of Londoners—wits, authors, city celebrities.

Quite a little court, indeed, were around her. And she was talking and laughing.

Now she was flinging a bonnet to one, a verbal boomerang to another, and poising and tossing with airiest grace the conversational ball which some find so very difficult to keep decorously rolling.

"Mamma!"

"Yes, love."

"I must steal you for a few minutes."

With a laughing apology the Countess rose, joined her daughter.

"You are dancing too much, Iva. I know you are. You are white as a ghost."

But Lady Romaine could not be accused of pallor. Her delicately-cut young face was all alight, her cheeks like damask roses.

"You look—well, just angelic, mamma. But I came to tell you Mrs. Brown says she is anxious to see you at once."

Mrs. Brown was the housekeeper.

"Why?"

The girl shook her head.

"I don't know. But it must be something important, or she would not call you."

"Well, I shall see."

"Let me go too, mamma."

The Countess hesitated.

"It would not look well if it were noticed we both were absent."

"But we shall not be missed for a few minutes. They are dancing the Lancers. I crossed that off my card."

So they went away together, down through the broad lower hall to the housekeeper's room—a bright, cosy, home-like nest of a place.

Mrs. Brown, quite imposing in her black silk and gold chain, rose and dropped a reverential greeting as they came in.

The little old woman in the muffler and plaid shawl who sat opposite the portly housekeeper rose also.

"I was sent by Granny Morris," she explained, in the slow voice the ladies recognized as that of Mrs. Lester, "to tell you about the child. He has been—Ah!"

Abruptly she retreated as she caught sight of the Countess.

Mrs. Brown smiled serenely.

Of course the poor creature was dazed! Who would not be at such a delightful apparition—her lovely ladyship in all the splendour of her white satin wedding-gown, her diamonds, and her beauty?

"Well?" rather impatiently.

She unfurled her great, snowy fan nervously.

Something must be wrong!

"He has been ailing for the last few days. He is worse to-night."

She paused.

The fan which Pompadour had swayed clicked, shut.

The Countess took one step forward.

"Go on!"

Lady Iva's startled glance was also fastened on the messenger.

"The doctor came yesterday, again this afternoon. He says—"

She hesitated. Was her silence that of emotion? or only a method of torturing the noble lady before her?

The Countess grasped the woman's thin, bare wrist.

"What?"

How hoarse the query sounded,

"That the child is dying, your ladyship."

"Oh!"

A cry of pain it was, short and fierce and sharp. She flung from her the arm she had clutched. Her fan fell to the floor. She threw her arms up across her eyes.

Mrs. Brown stared.

Why should her ladyship care so much?—the laddie was nothing to her.

Iva hurried forward, put her arm around the Countess. Her own sweet eyes were dim.

"No, no, little mamma! don't feel so badly. It cannot be so—so awful as all that, I know. Poor little Willie!"

To see her own dear young lady grieved roused Mrs. Brown.

"You shouldn't ha' come here," she declared, turning to Mrs. Lester, with old-country bluntness—"an' her ladyship that delicate, too."

But her ladyship dropped her gloved arms to her sides.

She was herself again.

"You did quite right; but you should have come sooner. Iva, go back to the ball-room—go at once."

"But you, mamma—"

"Go, dear!"

The tone was one of command.

The girl hesitated.

"For my sake—for Willie's!"

How terribly sensitive she was, her little mamma! Why, she was colourless as she had been at the beginning of the ball. Her eyes had actually a wild look.

The pleading prevailed. She went back to the crush, the light, the melody, the jollity and excitement of it all.

But there was a queer, hard lump in her throat which would not be swallowed.

The Countess watched her vanish, then she wheeled around.

She nodded to Mrs. Lester:

"Come!"

Both women stared at her. Heedless of them, she flashed out of the room, along a corridor leading to a door opening into the garden.

"The Lord ha' mercy!" cried Mrs. Brown. And she rushed after her mistress with more agility than grace.

The Countess was tugging at the stiff door-bolt.

"Open this! Be quick!"

In this dingy lower passage the light on the wall flickered in the draughts.

"Oh, my lady!"

The good woman was aghast.

"Open it, I tell you! Can't you hear?" she cried, imperiously.

"But, my lady—"

In frantic impatience the Countess tore off her long gloves, seized anew, with little, bare, jewelled hands, the resisting barrier.

The sound of the music, the dancing, the murmurous, drowsy hum of the far-off successful Christmas ball came faintly to them.

"You are never going out, my lady?"

She was dismayed, shocked! How could she think of such a thing, and in those clothes? The sternest night which had come this year, too!

Why, it was madness!

But my lady, fiercely, silently bruising her fair fingers with the latch, succeeded—flung the door back.

In rushed a gust of wind, a flurry of snow. The light flared, then sank low.

She was fairly driven back for the instant.

But she gathered her long, shining skirts in her hands, bent her sparkling head, took a step forward.

"Consider, my lady, your death of cold—slippers! Don't—begging your pardon—but, my lady—here!"

For not the slightest attention was the Countess paying to her.

If she would go, she would. So, with the final word, the housekeeper, who had been bounding around like a colossal India-rubber ball, snatched the plaid shawl from the shoulders of the little hunchback, and threw it over the bare back and arms of her mistress.

Not a second too soon, for with one bound the small, lithe form had cleared the threshold, and, with uncovered head and satin-slipped feet, was rushing madly on through the white and whirling winter night.

CHAPTER XLI.

"HEAVEN bless us!" supplicated Mrs. Brown.

She fell back puffing.

"Such a trick!"

And she slapped her broad palms together, and rolled up her eyes.

"May I have a shawl?"

It was Mrs. Lester who meekly presented the appeal.

"Oh, yes; I took yours, didn't I? The poor dear lady! I doubt"—in a confidential whisper—"if she is quite right. Perhaps"—bringing up every few words with much effort and wheeziness—"the shock of her sister's sudden death—upset her. Leastways—I'm all of a tremble—leastways, my cousin, who is—Mrs. Martin Simpson, of the inn where they stopped, said (feel of my hand ma'm) as how her ladyship—took on—dreadful. What a thing it is to have a shortness—of breath."

"But the shawl?"

"Yes, yes."

She took herself away, came back with a dark cloak.

"Here—hurry—catch up with her! She'll be frightened alone. Oh, sech a night, an' she in a ball-dress, an'—"

But the woman had snatched the proffered garment—fled.

And Mrs. Brown shut the door, lumbering back to her parlour, and sat down, excited and panting.

"She's daft, sure, her ladyship. To go out on foot, and the snow thick an' still a-coming down. An' all for a little orphaning who is no kin to her. Oh, ought I tell Lady Iva? What will the Earl say? An' the ball going on! Lordy, if it wasn't for this shortness of breath—"

She picked herself up with a good deal of celerity, went to a cabinet, and by use of an amber restorative increased the strength, if not the length of that, the brevity of which she mourned.

One!

To the little creature flying furiously down the great avenue through the night, the storm, the thick, blinding, velvety, eddying whiteness, the solitary stroke tolling from the bell-tower sounded like the knell of doom.

Dying! That was what she had said; that was the word—dying!

While she had been dancing, and chatting, and laughing in the glow, the luxury, the festal mirth, he, in a poor cottage at her gate, lay dying—he, her child!

She had not stopped to think, to deliberate the wisest course before she fled. She must go to him—she would, whatever the consequences. Assuredly she did not pause to consider now.

He was her child, her own child, her only child, and he lay dying!

That was the whip which drove her out from the magnificence of her home and of her father, which scourged her into her wild flight, which forced her fiercely and relentlessly on.

She was a clever woman, a bold woman, a woman of resources; but to-night she had not plotted nor schemed at all, nor looked one inch ahead.

For the second time in all her young, eventful life she had simply followed the mandates of her woman's heart.

What was the grandeur behind her? the people in the grand house there? the Parisian costumes, the gems, the flowers, the mellow wines, the flooding waves of sensuous sound? What were they to her? Nothing now.

What was anything, anyone to her this hour save the little lad who lay dying at her gate? And so she fled on.

Dimmer grew the streaming lights behind. No longer could she hear the gay triumphant music. On and on! The gaunt trees hurried by, and ever thick and dense the swirling snow fell and drifted.

Her shawl had fallen from her shoulders; bare were they in the bitter, wintry night. Her feet were soaked and heavy with snow. The train of her costly gown weighed on her arm like lead.

Numb, shivering, half-dazed, on she went, running, stumbling, dashing the snow from her eyes, never once pausing, never once looking behind—on and on!

And now she could see the great iron gates looming darkly up ahead. And there was the candle in the cottage window, and—

For the first time she stopped—reeled.

What if he were dead?

And then she was at the door, had flung wide—sprang in.

Granny's wrinkled and anxious old face appeared.

"Mercy on me!"

No wonder she cried out.

It was a strange vision to behold there, and at that unearthly hour.

A young and slender form, all clad in bridal satin and flashing diamonds! Dark head, bare bosom and arms, all thickly flecked with snow. A fair and a patrician face, flushed with rapid running, glittering-eyed with fright and fear!

"How is he?"

A mere whisper the words.

The old woman shook her head.

"No better."

But the tone said "worse!"

Her ladyship pushed by her into the parlour—into the little bedroom off.

On his own small rosewood bed—a present from her—he lay.

The tiny face was crimson with fever. The great black eyes were all ablaze. In a lustrous tangle his golden curls were tossed over the pillow.

He saw her as in her gleaming-satin, her flashing jewels, her snow-flecked hair, she stood on the threshold.

Something—hope, love, gladness all at once, all one—swept over the baby-face, lit it to almost unearthly loveliness.

Through all his pain, his delirium, he knew her.

"My lady!" he cried.

And he held out his arms.

His lady! Yes; not his mother. How could he know, poor little lamb!

But for one agonized moment the Countess wished she had, on learning he still lived, flung aside name, prestige, position, luxury—all for him.

She hurried forward.

She sank down beside the crib.

"Yes, yes! I am here. Look at me, Willie!" she implored.

But he did not see her now. For one brief moment only had reason been his. Then had he recognized her. Again was he tossing and moaning, deaf and blind to all save his pain, his feverish fancies.

She did not once think of the strangeness of her presence here. How odd it would appear to her in her reasoning hours! How they would miss her at the Castle, comment on her absence perhaps grow satirically suspicious!

She did not wonder what Harold would say or Iva consider. She did not think of anything save that the baby lying, burning and babbling before her was hers—her own, her treasure—a hidden treasure, perhaps—but none the less precious; and he was dying.

She did not try to deceive herself. There was no mistaking the fatality of the disease which had claimed that poor little helpless thing.

He was dying—yes. Oh, if he were only older, she would tell him (and pathetically she assured herself he might understand) that she was his mother, and that she loved him!

Mother! Bah! the word would have no significance for him. He knew no mother. How could he know the name?

The bitterness of death—oh, worse than that—of life at its saddest, engulfed the woman who crouched there in soulless splendour and crumbling pride.

If he had known he lived, if no one had lied to her twenty months ago, she would have kept him, clung to him.

She tried to console herself with the thought.

She would never have abandoned him. At her worst, she could not have been bad enough for that. But she had been told that he was dead. And when she learned the contrary she was in a position where truth would have meant downfall, social oblivion. And she thought, in bringing him here, watching over him here, she would be doing the best in her power for him, and all would be well.

But was it?

Ah! what would she not give now if, forgetting all the pretty baby-talk she had been so anxious he should learn, so proud to hear him speak, he should whisper, "Mamma."

But he never had—he never would.

He loved her—yes, but not with the love she hungered for.

To him as to others she was "my lady."

But surely the words gained fresh beauty, trust, tenderness, when the cooing little voice altered, made them sweet enough.

"To take between the dainty milk-fed lips."

At the door old Granny Morris stood looking in. Behind her like a shadow, the hunchback hovered. And into the faded orbs of the old woman, and those harder ones under the great glasses, came a mist which blurred out the picture before them. The small white bed; the little sufferer thereon, swinging from side to side, crying in the sobbing way of children in pain; and, crouching beside him, her arms outflung over the coverlet, her ear still flashing with diamonds, all ruffled and wet, her costly gown, heaped, dragged around her, her face a thing of marble, her breath coming pantingly, her gaze never leaving the little stricken child before her—his mother! For such one of the watchers suspected her to be—such the other knew she was.

Two!

Even here it reached them, the heavy, booming sound.

"My darling—oh, my little darling, don't you know me?"

But there came no answer to the piteous cry, only the low fretful sobbing. Just one flash of recognition when she appeared. That was all. Then his thoughts had all gone away to a world in which she could not intrude.

Steps? Yes. Crunching the snow under heel, hurrying up the garden path.

Who was coming—the Earl? Would he suspect? Would he tear her away? He was gentle, good—yes, oh, yes; but what might he not do discovering what he would?

She leaped up.

"Don't let any one come in—in here—not any one!" she cried.

Granny Morris tottered to the hallway.

Erect, with arm outflung, stony-faced and wild-eyed, the Countess still stood.

Hark! voices! And he had gained admittance.

Who was it?

Nearer came the step.

She looked toward the threshold.

Capped, coated, white with snow, a man stood thereon.

He advanced.

A faint cry escaped her.

He here—he of all men! Sir Geoffrey Damyn!

CHAPTER XLII.

He came on into the little room, crossed to the other side of the bed.

Her arm fell to her side.

"Who sent you?"

Was that the voice of my lady—hard, and fierce, and strange?

He removed his cap of fur, bowed low.

"No one. Lady Iva told me of the message which had been sent you. She did not seem to suspect you would come here. She was marvelling, in fact, at your protracted absence. I knew you would."

Was he daring her, braving her, with his knowledge of her secret?

Her angry glance enveloped him.

"And who, pray, authorised your supervision of my actions?"

"No one, as I have said. I came of my own accord. Have I—answer me—have I no right here?"

Up on the pillow in a sudden spasm the child wrenched himself.

"Oh, hush!" she cried. "We shall not quarrel now?"

Again she sank down beside the little bed.

"Is there no medicine he should take, granny? Can nothing be done?"

The sweet, wailing voice! It reached the two women in the kitchen beyond.

The old lodgekeeper hobbled in.

"A spoonful of that, my lady, on the table at your elbow. 'Tis to make the end easy, I fancy. There is no more to be done. So Dr. Callen said."

And then she went back to her chimney corner, her pipe, and her cogitations.

With infinite care, infinite gentleness, the Countess measured out the draught, held it to the feverish little lips.

She slipped her hand under his head, urged him to swallow it.

And when he had done so she cuddled him up to her, crooning over him with soft, tender, nonsensical mother-talk.

"My love, my dove, my little birdie!"

As for Sir Geoffrey Damyn, she had already forgotten him, his existence, his very presence.

Three!

But she did not even hear the ponderous strokes now. All her heart, her eyes, her soul, her consciousness, were bounded by the circle of her arms.

Did the fun at the Castle still rage fast and furious? Were they discussing her absence? What excuse could the Earl tender? What would Iva say? What was the band playing now?

She did not know; she did not care. In her arms her child lay dying!

A sudden stillness had come upon him. No longer raved the flute-like, broken voice. The rosy limbs were motionless. The small, soft hands were thrown out— inert they lay. And on her arm the tossed and tangled yellow head hung heavily.

Damyn drew his breath hard. Dimly he began to see how it all was. He had been rash enough on coming here. He was bound to wring from her the truth—the whole truth. Now—well, now he was man enough, instinctively chivalrous enough, to be silent. By and by perhaps he would speak—not now.

In the kitchen without Granny Morris dropped into a dose. Very wide-awake her companion sat upright. Here Geoffrey Damyn leaned against the glaringly papered wall and looked down on the white bed and the woman just beyond it—was she the woman he had loved?

But she had no glance, no thought even, for him—for any one.

On that tiny face was fastened all her heart, all her soul. How pale it was growing! Fast was the scarlet of fever fading to dull red, to rose, to pink, to pallor, then it was gone.

"Oh, my own—my own!" she sobbed.

But the words sounded faint and far away. The curling lashes lifted. Into hers looked the frank and fearless gaze, full of the love, the confidence, the appealingness, full more than all of the divine truth one sees only in the eyes of a little child.

"Oh, my yady—my yady!"

And now he was smiling. In a tempestuous passion of devotion, despair, remorse, she clutched him to her heart, held him there with a close and straining fervour.

"My little boy!" she cried.

Four!

Could it be? Yes. One, two, three, four! Up at the Castle outcrashed, upwelled the music of the last waltz.

But here the lady of that palace home, the beautiful mistress of it all, crouched, world-forgetting and wrath-defying at the bedside of her dying child.

Listen!

Again steps. And straight to the cottage door they came.

How terribly white the little face was growing!

The Countess bent her flame-flecked head. Lower—still lower.

"Willie!"

"My yady!"

"Say mamma!"

Could he? Would he?

The heavy step was at the outer door. She neither heard nor heeded. The pretty hands were cold. There were drops on the smooth forehead.

"Mamma!"

With bursting heart she kissed the damp brow. Over and over those hot, sweet lips caressed him.

Wearily he looked up at her.

"What is tat, my yady?"

"What, darling?"

"What does mamma mean?"

"Oh, Heaven!"

The heartbroken cry went wailing through the house.

The man striding through the little dark parlour heard it.

"Willie!"

He did not move.

"Willie!" louder.

But no sound came.

More heavily his head hung on her arm. The dark eyes were set, staring! the pale lips were apart.

She drew her breath gaspingly, was on her feet in a second.

"He is dead!" she cried.

The misery, the pathos of the young voice pierced even the toughened sensibility of Geoffrey Damyn.

But he dashed his hand across his eyes. He must fulfil the mission on which he had come.

"Tell me the truth! Whose child is this?"

She lifted her lovely haggard face.

"Yours!"

"Mine! And—"

Just then she saw the man in the doorway—saw the intent, brown-bearded, half-angry, half-terrified face of the Earl of Silverdale.

"Yes, yours, and—"

Would she brand the dead? Why not? She was dead.

"Yours and Marguerite's!"

CHAPTER XLIII.

Marguerite's!

Through every nerve, every fibre of the man who stood in the doorway, that one word went thrilling.

Not hers—Marguerite's—Geoffrey Damyn's and Marguerite's!

That was the meaning of it all; it was quite clear and patent to him. This was the child of his wife's sister, who died two months ago—hers and Damyn's.

And it was of her, Marguerite, she had spoken in the conservatory that night; and it was because of her Lillian had wanted the baby under her own eyes, her own care.

And he had doubted her, was growing suspicious of her, jealous, resentful and hard. An infinite remorse rushed over him, through him.

He advanced.

"Lillian!"

But she did not answer—did not take the slightest notice of him.

She was half lying across the small bed, cuddling the little, fair, chill body to her bosom, whispering to it, crooning to it all kinds of loving, foolish baby language.

Bareheaded, his hands thrust in his overcoat pockets, leaning against the wall beyond, Geoffrey Damyn watched the sad scene.

He was not thinking of himself. Who was there present to think of him!

So his thoughts mirrored themselves in rapid succession on his face—love, rage, impotent longing, sorrow and dull despair.

His child—that fact was clear—the child whom he had not known lived, lay dead, before him! But for her who shrank beside the weeny, waxen thing—who was she? Marguerite's sister? or Marguerite? The question was enough to drive one crazy.

He could not ask now; but it was denoted hard for a man not to know if she who moaned over his son's dead body was his wife or sister-in-law.

"Lillian!" again.

The Earl advanced.

She did not heed or hear him.

Granny Morris came hobbling in. The little hunchback did not intrude; she hovered in the apartment beyond.

"Come home, love."

He was beside her now, bending over her.

Very gentle his voice sounded. Only he could tell how stupendous the relief of his discovery had been to him.

She looked with distended, terrified eyes.

"You shall not take me away—you shall not!" she cried.

He fell back.

How much she must have cared for the tiny creature! How her heart must have been wrapped up in him!

"Talk to her, granny."

They must get her home—away from here.

The truth—as he believed it—was bound to get out anyway, bound to become known.

But it was not right that she should grieve so madly over the death of her sister's child.

The old woman approached her.

"He's dead, your ladyship. Come away. You can't help the bairnie now. You've got the consolation of knowing you were good to him."

Good?

She flashed her one angry, upward glance.

Why could they not leave her alone? And then her gaze went back again to the tiny face upon her breast.

Oddly enough it just now looked like Geoffrey Damyn's done in wax—more like his than it had ever looked before.

The half-drooped lids gave one a glimpse of the glassy curve below. The pretty, parted lips showed the few small, pearly teeth. No tuberosity was paler than the round cheeks, no snowflake softer. And the tiny hands—Ah, how pathetic they were in their helplessness, their stillness!

If the black eyes could only light up once more, the little mouth dimple into a roguish smile—if the quiet hands would only essay some merry mischief, the bird-like voice laugh out again in its "own, one way!"

But, no—never again! Not though the night vanished, and in the sunshine the snow wept itself away. Not when the spring would come with young grass pushing its green spears up, with daffodil's sheen and tulip's brilliant splendour. Not though the burnished beauty of the summer, lying over all the land, should lavish poppies through the fields of wheat like rubies flung on plates of gold. Not though the thrush sang in the elms, and babbling temptingly the wee brown brook came tumbling down the dell. Never again!

Oh, dreary was the future, rayless, bitter! Why should she live—why again take up the peddler-back existence which so many of us rebelliously carry, yet fear to fling aside?

"He loved your ladyship," the cracked voice went on in its lugubrious attempt at consolation. "He did, sir," turning to Geoffrey. "Aye! that he did!" to his lordship. "He loved Lady Iva, too, but the Countess more than all. Why, he used call her (bless the dear, dead lamb!) he used call her his lady. 'My yady!' he always said, and —"

But the Countess interrupted her.

Still holding the dead baby close to her heart, she looked up—around at them.

"Yes, his lady!" Oh, the anguish, the heartbreak of the cry! "I was always that to him—that only. I never was his mother. Why, just now, before he—went away, he asked me what mamma meant. And he—oh!" she sprang up with a wail those around her never forgot, so sad, so frantic, so despairing was it—"and he my own child!"

CHAPTER XLIV.

To Geoffrey Damyn the words carried conviction, though little conviction, indeed, he needed. But to the Earl they meant only the hyperbole of hysteria, exhaustion.

She did not know what she was saying. She was worn out with excitement, fatigue. The boy she had so charitably cared for had become so dear to her she almost fancied him her own.

He put his arm around her, drew her to his side.

"Yes, yes, dear," he murmured, "you loved the little fellow—I understand! Why did you not tell me all about it long ago? Not," quickly, "that I mean to reproach you."

Damyn bit his lips.

It was not very pleasant to stand idly there and behold his wife comforted for the loss of their child by a stranger—not pleasant even when one knew the stranger considered he had the right to embrace and console her.

How unsuspecting the Earl was! how loyally disregarding of even her own wild confession! The blow would be terrific when he could be brought to realize it, as he must be.

For the Countess the reaction had set in. A sort of apathy had fallen upon her. Without protest she let the Earl draw her from the bedside into the parlour.

"I'm afraid you will be ill, Lillian. It was a rash thing to do, my dear—to come out unprotected in such a storm. Look at your feet!"

Stupidly she glanced downward. The pretty Spanish slippers of white satin were soiled and soaked.

"You cannot return as you came, Damyn," he called, "will you go up to the Castle, like a good fellow, and tell them to send down the coach?"

Sir Geoffrey came out at sound of the Earl's voice. Both men, in full evening dress, looked almost as much out of place in this common, artistically dimly lit room as did the richly-attired Countess herself.

"Certainly."

"Better take a stiff drink and get to bed!" advised his lordship, cordially. You look a good deal fagged yourself, old fellow."

Sir Geoffrey smiled grimly.

He had had more to make him look and feel fagged this morning than his noble friend could imagine.

Five!

The tower clock was striking the hour as he went out of the cottage, down the path, and turned up the avenue to the Castle.

It had ceased snowing, but there was yet no hint of dawn.

Two or three belated carriages rolled past him.

The vast front of the castle was still a blaze of light. But how silent it was! The music no longer pulsed pealingly out, the great rooms were deserted.

He went up the steps.

Before he reached the door it was opened. Just within stood Iva. Farther down the hall he could see Aunt Clara.

"I've been listening—I heard you. Oh, Sir Geoffrey, how is Willie?"

Taking off his hat, he passed her.

Would she not understand his silence?

She went swiftly up to where he stood, lifted her lovely, anxious face to his.

"Not worse?"

His voice sounded quite husky when he answered her.

"No—better! There is no worse for him now. Everything is well—poor little lad!" "Oh!" she cried out, in sudden, sorrowful comprehension.

The poor baby! the dear, bright, coaxing, winsome little fellow, with his clinging arms, his warm, sweet caresses, his merry laugh and all his loving ways!

Were they in truth over now? Had he gone away so soon into the storm, into the night? Such a tiny traveller to journey alone to that land of dread, of marvel and of mystery, which men call death!

Her lips quivered. The shining eyes brimmed over.

She turned away.

(To be continued.)

RUBY'S DESTINY.

—:—

CHAPTER I.

In the tawdry sitting-room of a very fourth-rate *appartement*, in a semi-fashionable quarter of Paris, a young girl sat before the expiring embers of a wood fire in deep thought.

It was a January evening; the cold air blew sharp and keen, penetrating through the ill-made window frames, and making the room too airy far for comfort; but though it was the night of all others on which a fire would have been a comfort—though the stout logs lay ready to her hand, Ruby Norton made no attempt to replenish the open grate. She was so lost in thought that she had forgotten all creature discomforts.

Her eyes were fixed in eager expectancy. Her ears were strained in anxious listening towards the door, a few paces off, which led to the room where Captain Norton, her father and last surviving parent, lay dying, and whence she had been dismissed imperatively an hour before by the shrewd yet kind-hearted doctor.

But, terrible as it may sound, we must confess, even at the risk of losing all sympathy for her, it was not passionate grief which made Ruby so absorbed in her thoughts.

The man whose account was so nearly ended had never done anything to cause her to mourn him.

James Norton was a bad man, bad to the core, false to the very heart; a man whose foes despised him, and whose acquaintance—such as he never made friends—could never trust him.

There had been no mother to screen his character from the critical eyes of his young daughter, and Ruby had the gift which comes so often to the children of adventurers.

She could see things as they were, and judge for herself.

She knew perfectly that her father had forfeited the esteem of all honourable men, even though he had done nothing to place himself within reach of the law.

She knew he cared for no creature upon earth except James Norton, ex-captain in one of her Majesty's regiments, and that he would shrink from no act which would advance his own interest and comfort.

It was a sad enough life his daughter recalled, as she let her thoughts wander to the past.

She could barely remember her mother. Only a vague instinct told her that mother's early death had been hastened by a broken heart.

There were faint memories of someone who loved her and caressed her; but the first plain recollection Ruby had was of a French pension, and herself the shabbiest and youngest of the boarders.

From six to sixteen it had been her fate to wander from pension to pension, often being dismissed on account of her father's forgetting such a trifle as to pay the bill.

Interspersed with these school-days came the irregular visits paid to her father, wherever he might be; visits usually caused not by paternal affection, but by some irate head-mistress weary of sending in her account, in despair despatching Ruby and her boxes back to the Captain.

How well the girl recalled it all up, to the day when she was sixteen, and her father solemnly informed her she had cost him a mint of money, and must dispense with all further education.

He installed her as mistress of the cheap appartement, where we first see her—gave her just sufficient money for clothes to prevent her shabbiness positively disgracing him, and coldly bid her be a good girl and not bother him.

It would have been a life unbearable in its loneliness but for one thing; the Captain still retained in his service the maid who had come with his wife when she left her father's house.

Deborah had been devoted to her lady, and for her sake kept faithful to her husband. The old woman (perhaps, because age is more pitiful than youth, perhaps because in her eyes he was still her young lady's handsome lover) judged her master far more tenderly than his daughter could bring herself to do. An annuity from a former employer would have kept Deborah in comfort in her native land, but she preferred to follow the fortunes of James Norton and his child.

She never had a penny of wages—indeed, she often helped on the wheels of domestic machinery from her own purse. She loved Ruby passionately; but, even for her sake, would not speak harshly of the master. A servant of the old-fashioned stamp, who had had spent all her life in good families, perhaps Ruby owed to her something more than kindness. The quiet self-command, the art of making herself respected, even by the strange company Mr. Norton gathered round him, the making the utmost of her scanty wardrobe, all this had come to Ruby from her old nurse.

But dearly as she loved her—though in most things Miss Norton could, as the saying goes, "wind her old nurse round her finger"—there were two points on which Deborah maintained a discreet silence. The most urgent entreaties, the most coaxing pleading, could not induce her to tell Miss Ruby why her father left England, or whether he had any relations yet living in the country which, though she had been absent from it more than twenty years, the old woman yet called "home."

She would talk of her dead mistress by the hour, telling Ruby many an incident of her mother's life in the old country village, where her father had been vicar. Deborah said it was the old clergyman's death which set her free to accompany her young lady to France; but why the journey had to be taken, why Captain Norton, being then young and his own master, could not have married in England nurse never would say.

"Grandpapa must have been rich!" remarked Miss Ruby, thoughtfully, one day, when Nurse had received her half-yearly income of twenty pounds.

"Bless me, my dear, he was as poor as poor could be. It was just that made me go to him when his wife died! Miss Vera—that was your mamma—was a mite of nine, and there was no one to see to things. My lady had died, and left me independent. I told the Vicar I should trouble him for nothing but my food, and after a little hesitating he agreed. It's thirty years ago, my dear, and more."

And now, as she sat by the expiring fire, the feeling at Ruby's heart was not so much that she was going to lose her father as that she must soon be alone in the world. Precarious and uncertain as Mr. Norton's income was, it had yet kept the wolf from the door. Ruby had become used to alternate between a kind of Bohemian luxury and excessive pinching and calculating, but she

had never been face to face with actual want. She had gone shabby many a time; she had dined before now on bread and fruit, but she had never yet been reduced to the certainty that when the money in the house was spent she had no more, and no chance of any unless she earned it. She could not live on Nurse, that was certain; she must do something, but what?

In some things precocious beyond her age, Ruby was in others perfectly ignorant. She knew, of course, that teaching and dress-making were common channels of female industry, but her own education had been too interrupted to make her competent for the first, and the second she shrank from. One gift she had, a beautiful voice, but to make money by it, it would need cultivation, and that was beyond her reach.

Blame her not that she could think of her own future when her father was dying. James Norton had done nothing to call forth her love, or earn her gratitude.

He had told her again and again she was a burden to him, had cursed the day she was born to him, instead of his eagerly desired son (though what good an heir would have been to him, seeing he had nothing to bequeath, Ruby could not guess); he had taunted her before now with her shabbiness; he had outraged every feeling of her heart long before she had emerged from childhood.

She was afraid of him, and yet, strange anomaly, she despised him. She knew he was a bad man, and all poor Nurse's arguments that he was a gentleman and must have his own way, and allowances made for him, influenced her nothing.

"It's in the blood, my dear," said Nurse, one day. "The Nortons were always a little wild."

"A little wild!" Ruby's lips curled in scorn. "Are all the Nortons bad? Do none of them ever speak the truth? If so, it seems to me, nurse, it is rather a misfortune to be born a Norton."

It was no sudden illness that had laid the Captain low. He had been attacked by a strange, feverish ague in the autumn, and had never regained his strength, but of late he had sunk rapidly.

He had even perceived it himself, and written a few letters. Ruby wondered to whom, but she was not allowed to touch them.

Nurse, who would hardly stir from the sick room, even for her meals, had put on her bonnet and posted them with her own hands. That was three or four days ago. One letter—perhaps a reply—had come that very afternoon; but the patient had been asleep, and not even for such a marvel as a foreign letter would Deborah suffer him to be disturbed.

The gilt clock on the mantelpiece struck eleven, and Ruby shivered and shivered again. Before its last echo had died away the door of the sick room opened, and Mr. Darby came out—a clever, straightforward man, who had pitched his tent in Paris, and established a good practice among his compatriots.

He had attended Captain Norton for two months without seeing the colour of his money. He already suspected he never should see it, but he was not the man for that reason to withhold his aid; besides, he had girls of his own, and his heart ached for Ruby.

She had started up now to meet him, a tall slip of a girl, with that combination rarely seen of luxuriant black hair and large, expressive blue eyes.

She was barely twenty, and yet very soon she would be alone in the world.

The man lying in the next room had not been much to boast of as a parent; but, at least, he had given the girl a home—a kind of careless protection from the cold, rough world.

"My dear," said the doctor, "he is asking for you. Can you be calm? Remember, any agitation will do him harm. Can you command yourself?"

She shivered violently as she rose to follow him, but that was her only sign of emotion.

In a kind of hushed voice she asked,—

"Is he no better?"

"He never can be better in this world, my child! It is only a question of a few hours, perhaps a few minutes!"

Deborah would have drawn back when the young lady entered the sick room, but the dying man made her a sign to keep her place.

Mr. Darby lingered too. It mattered nothing, Ruby and her father had not lived in that tender affection which makes a stranger's presence seem sacrilege at the last sad goodbye.

"Well," said Mr. Norton, gruffly, as he looked at her, "I suppose they have told you it's nearly over?"

She bowed her head.

"You need not pretend to be sorry!" he sneered. "I daresay you'll manage to get on very well without me. Your uncle has sent to offer you a home."

"My uncle?"

"Don't repeat my words like an echo!" said the sick man, querulously. "My twin brother must be your uncle, I suppose? Very well! Then he has sent to say you can live with him. It won't be very lively," and the Bohemian gave a grim smile, as though some recollection amused him, "but it will be respectable."

"Does my uncle live in England?"

"Where else should he live? He lives at the Court, the place that ought to have been mine—that would have been mine but for a moment's folly. And, listen to me, Ruby. Don't trust your uncle; never believe a word he says to you. When he speaks to you fairest doubt him most. He is rich, ay, rich as a lord, but it all came to him by fraud. If only I had had money I would have fought it out, ay, to the bitter end!"

"You must not excite yourself," said the doctor, gravely. "And, indeed, Captain, you are giving Miss Norton cruel advice! Why should you attempt to prejudice her against her new home?"

"She'll find him out for herself," said the father, coolly. "She has plenty of brains; but it's only fair to warn her. And remember, my girl, your face is your fortune, and you must do the best you can with it. I've made a muddle of my life, but you may do better with yours."

He sank back exhausted on his pillow, and was silent for a few moments. When he spoke again his mind seemed to wander. His eyes were fixed on Ruby, but surely his words were not for her.

"It is nearly over, my darling!" he said, faintly, "and I am coming to you. I haven't done much for the child. You see, I could never forgive her she was not a boy; but maybe you'll understand; you always made allowances for me, Vera!"

And Ruby knew then he was speaking to her mother.

With the first tender impulse she had felt towards him for years she stooped down, and tried to take his hand, but he wrenched it away with a gleam of departing strength, and murmured hoarsely,—

"You are not like her. She was gentle and affectionate. You are a Norton. Remember John Norton is your uncle, but you must not trust him. Even when he seems kindest, beware of him. He hated you before you were born, and he will go on hating you to the end."

The old nurse said something in a low voice, but James Norton only shook his head impatiently, and continued, fiercely,—

"He must hate her. Isn't she my child? Besides, he was always mean. Why does he offer her a home if he has no evil object? But she is a Norton and no fool; she can hold her own if she chooses."

That was all. He never spoke again. He had gone to his last account without one word of affection or regard, no kind farewell, not one tender look or fatherly caress. Mr. Darby had stood by many a deathbed, but he thought he had never witnessed a sadder one than this.

Very gently he led the orphan girl back to the sitting-room and placed her in a chair beside the fire, which some servant had re-kindled.

"My dear," he said kindly, "this is a terrible time for you, but you must not attach too much importance to your poor father's last words. Very often illness makes a man take up unfounded prejudices. Your uncle may be all that is generous and estimable. I think his being willing to offer you a home shows he can have only kindly feelings to you."

Ruby pushed back her hair from her face, and looked up thoughtfully into the doctor's face.

"I wish you would tell me all you know?"

"About what, my dear?"

"About us! Try to make it plain to me if you can. You know how poor we are, yet my father spoke of his brother as rich. Then, if we have relations, why have I never heard anything about them?"

Mr. Darby looked perplexed.

"Your father was the last man to take strangers into his confidence. I assure you that, though I have known him for years, I never had any idea till to-night that he was one of the Westshire Nortons."

"But is he?"

"He must be. He said his brother was master of Norton Court. I know the Nortons are an old and honourable family, and that they have lived in Westshire for centuries—a little wild, perhaps, but a grand old race!"

"And this man, my uncle?"

The doctor shook his head.

"My dear, I have not been in Westshire for thirty years. The Squire then living was an old man—a bachelor with two nephews, whom he had educated and brought up. The young men were away. I met the old gentleman once or twice. He was a fine specimen of an English landowner. I can only conclude that the nephews I never met were your father, and your unknown uncle," he hesitated—"but I assure you, you need have no fears for the future. Norton Court is one of the finest estates in Westshire, and the Squire's niece will be able to hold her own with anyone."

Ruby looked thoughtfully into the fire.

"I wonder if Nurse knows?"

"Mrs. Charles. The very person. She will be able to give you all particulars, and now I must leave you. Mrs. Darby shall come round early in the morning, and see if she can help you, and of course I will send off a telegram to your uncle as soon as possible."

The old Nurse, coming in, found Ruby in her old position, staring into the fire as though she read some story within there.

"My poor dear!"

Ruby buried her head in Deborah's lap, and said, brokenly,—

"I feel so strange. Oh! Nurse, is he really dead? Are you and I really alone in the world?"

"The master's gone to his rest, Miss Ruby," said Nurse, whose simple mind was troubled with no theological doubts as to the after fate of one who had been such a sinner as James Norton, "and you're left behind; but, my dear, you mustn't go to give way and fret."

That was the strangest pang in Ruby's heart—the feeling she could not grieve. They were father and child, yet she felt not one grain of honest sorrow at his death. Her whole life would be changed. She might regret the old free and easy life the little apartment which, poor and shabby genteel as it was, had yet been "home" to her, but she would never regret the man who had been its master. He had neglected her too utterly, wounded her girlish heart too often for that.

"I am not going to fret," she said, gently; "but, Deb, it is all so strange. I want to understand. Who is my Uncle John? Did you ever see him?"

"Me ever see him!" exclaimed Deborah, indignantly. "Why I was once maid to his mother, Miss Ruby. My husband was under-

gamekeeper at the Court, and when I was left a widow nothing would satisfy my lady—she was Lady Florence Norton, your grand-mamma—but that I should have lessons in dressmaking and hairdressing, and go and live with her as maid. She lived all the year round with her brother-in-law, the Squire, she and her two sons. He was mighty fond of her and of them too, and wouldn't hear of her having another house. I was twenty-five, Miss Ruby, when I went to the Court, and I stayed there ten years. The twins were little boys when I went; they were fine young men when I came away. I nursed my lady in her last illness, and she left me an annuity of forty pounds. I might have stayed on as housekeeper, but Mrs. Fane had died not many weeks after the mistress, and my heart yearned after her motherless child; so I went down to the Vicarage, and there I stayed till Miss Vera married your papa."

"Then Uncle John knew mamma?" hazarded Ruby, feeling sure there was something in the past hidden from her, and yet without an idea of what it could be.

"Everyone knows everyone in a small village," said Nurse, sagely. "Mr. John wasn't so much at the Vicarage as your papa. He married early, you see—not so long after his mother's death—and his wife was a very fine lady, and liked to live in London."

"Then I have an aunt," said Ruby, wonderingly, "and perhaps ever so many cousins?"

"You've no aunt, Miss Ruby, unless your uncle's married of late years. He was a widower when we left England, and the last time I heard of him he was a widower still. He's fifty-three now, and I should say was a great deal too old to think of another wife. You'll be mistress of the Court, dear, and it's a fine old place!"

"Nurse," cried Ruby, impatiently, "you are only playing with me. You know perfectly well I want to hear all about Uncle John. Why did my father hate him so, and why did he warn me against him? Papa disliked a great many people," added the girl naively, "but I never heard him say quite such hard things of anyone else."

"You see Miss Ruby," said Nurse slowly, as one weighing her words lest she should say too much. "You see the Court was a fine property, and not entailed. The old Squire could have divided it between his nephews, or left it to a charity even, if he pleased. Maybe your father—who had been his favourite—was a little hurt his brother should have all, and he be left out in the cold. Ah, my dear! money's a bad thing, and there have been more quarrels over it than over anything else."

Ruby felt satisfied. Her father had loved money dearly. If his twin brother had inherited any which he considered his due, it was quite enough to account for his antipathy.

"And papa wrote to Uncle John?"

"He wrote last week, my dear, a beautiful letter," said Nurse, approvingly. "He said he was not long for this world, and asked what provision his brother was willing to make for you."

It struck Ruby as rather a peculiar wording of an appeal to a rich relation, but she only asked,—

"And the answer?"

"I'm bound to confess, my dear, the master was sorely put out when he got the answer!"

"It came this afternoon?"

"No, dear, it came days ago. The Squire wrote by return of post. He said he was not rich (which is a wilful lie, Miss Ruby), and could not afford to settle a fortune on you, but if you liked to come to Westshire he would give you a home at the Court until you married."

"He might have said until I died!" objected Ruby. "It means just the same thing. I shall never marry!"

"That's as may be, Miss Ruby. Your father was much put out. He wouldn't even

write and thank your uncle. He sent off a letter to some man in London, who manages the estate. It was the answer to that came this afternoon. When he'd read it the master sent Mr. Darby for you. It was not till then I knew he'd brought himself to accept his brother's offer. He signed his will, Miss Ruby, just before you came in, and he made the Squire your guardian."

The long winter's night wore away, and late in the morning Ruby woke from her long troubled sleep of exhaustion to find Mrs. Darby sitting by her, an open telegram in her hand.

"I could not bear to wake you before, my dear, but it is nearly eleven, and we have had an answer from your uncle!"

"So soon?" murmured Ruby, in surprise. "He gives the doctor power to act for him in all things, and says he has written to you. I expect you will have the letter to-morrow, and then we shall know when you must go to England."

Ruby smiled wistfully.

"I used to long to go to England, and even now I can't be sorry. I wonder if its wicked of me!"

The doctor's wife, who had taken a far sterner view of James Norton's character than poor Deborah, shook her head.

"It is only natural, dear. You have had a very sad, lonely life, and it is no wonder you look forward to a change. I have relations in Westshire, Ruby, and I know a visit to them used to be the delight of my young days. I have never seen the Court, but I believe it is a charming place, and I expect you will be very happy there. Is Mr. John Norton married?"

"Nurse says he is a widower."

"Then he is sure to be fond of you," said Mrs. Darby kindly. "He will soon look on you as a daughter. Ruby, I do believe you are trembling!"

"Papa said he was a bad man, that I must never trust him," whispered Ruby. "Oh, Mrs. Darby, if he is kind to me can't I believe in him? You don't know what it is to go on day after day, month after month, living with a person you distrust!"

"My dear," said the lady, gently, "remember your father had not seen his brother for twenty years. You are not bound to think he may not have changed for the better in that time, even if he really deserved Captain Norton's description."

She did not add that, for her part, she considered the Captain's enmity as rather a credential to his brother's worth than otherwise, but Ruby quite understood some such idea was in her mind; indeed, it found an echo in her own.

The funeral took place that day, following the French custom, and Mrs. Darby would fain have removed the orphan to her own home, but Ruby clung to the shabby room where she had lived so long.

"It is very kind of you, but I would rather stay here. We have a good deal to do."

That was true. Captain Norton had had a brief spell of prosperity just before his death. There was money enough to defray his funeral, and pay all the little bills which came in so promptly at the news of his death. The apartment, being let furnished by the week, could be given up at a very brief notice, and the Nortons' personalities were so very few that two trunks would amply contain all that Ruby could call her own.

Mrs. Charles, however, had a vivid remembrance of the glories of Norton Court, and did not want her dear Miss Ruby to appear there in the guise of a poor relation. There were a few ornaments, a little bric-a-brac and other relics of prosperous days, which if sold would suffice to provide the orphan with a simple mourning outfit.

Mr. Darby approved this plan. He refused to send in his account or receive one penny for his services, and he gently cautioned the nurse against spending all the money she received. He thought that, alone, among

strangers, a few pounds in her pocket might be an advantage to Ruby.

He never mentioned, except to his wife, the brief letter he had received the day after the telegram, desiring him to provide for the funeral in the cheapest possible manner, and to send the amount of that and other unavoidable expenses to the Squire. Every line of the missive told of alarm, and the kindly Darbys would not pain Ruby by telling her of it, only they both felt a little money in her pocket would be of more help to her than an elaborate wardrobe.

Nearly a week passed, and Ruby was beginning to wonder at not receiving her uncle's promised letter, when one morning a card was brought to her inscribed, "Mr. Thomas Dyason."

Deborah took it from her nursing with an expression of dismay.

"The Dyasons were your uncle's lawyers. What in the world should he send a lawyer here for, dear?"

Ruby roused herself.

"Was it Mr. Dyason who sent that letter—the letter which made my father accept his brother's offer?"

"No, dear; that was from Mr. Grey, a kind of manager and bailiff down in Westshire. The Dyasons live in London. Dear me, but he must be old by this time! He was getting grey when we left England."

The nurse was as much astonished as Ruby to receive a tall, handsome stranger, seemingly not much over thirty—a man whose grey eyes inspired trust, and whose manner had a strange blending of cordiality and embarrassment.

"Miss Norton!" and he looked inquiringly at Ruby, who bowed in assent. "I am sent by your uncle, Mr. Norton, of Westshire, to bring a letter from him; and also to confer with you on one or two matters."

Ruby thought the post would have been cheaper; then, seeing that the gentleman looked at Deborah, she said, hastily—

"This is my dear old nurse, who lived at the Court when my father was a boy. You can have nothing to say to me, Mr. Dyason, that Mrs. Charles may not hear."

He shook hands with Deborah as courteously as though she had been a duchess.

"I have heard of Mrs. Charles; indeed, my father, who remembers her well, charged me if I found my mission distasteful to you, Miss Norton, to invoke your nurse's aid and sympathy."

He was so long before he spoke again that Ruby grew nervous.

"If you would give me the letter, please," she said, anxiously. "I think I should like to know the worst."

Instantly he handed it to her, and with feverish eagerness she broke the seal. Mr. Dyason looking carefully away from her lest he should seem to watch the impression it made on her, and the old nurse, with her eyes fondly fixed on her darling, waiting to hear the rich man's verdict.

Ruby Norman did not know till long afterwards how hard Thomas Dyason had resisted the errand forced on him—how it was only his father telling him he should be forced to go himself if he refused, since the elder son could not be spared, and it was too delicate a matter to trust to a clerk.

Only the desire to save his old father the trouble and fatigue of such a journey, that had brought the young man to agree to go. Even then he yielded with much grumbling, and the remark he did not see why they should have to do all their clients' dirty work just because they happened to be his lawyers.

And this was the letter:—

"DEAR NIECE,—

"I told your father I was willing to give you a home—plain, and, I hope I may add, respectable, though, no doubt, very different from the gay, butterfly life you have led in Paris. Though James never did me the honour to answer my letter, I am told you

mean to accept my offer, and I am ready to stand by it. For our mutual comfort in the future I had better mention one or two matters. To begin with, I don't know what you have been told of me, but I am a poor man, for my position—very poor. I don't mean I'm a beggar. I pay my way, and owe no man anything, but I've no money to throw away. I am willing to provide for you at the Court, and so see that you have all the necessities of life, but you must expect luxuries or amusements. Then, too, I hear your father retained Mrs. Charles in his service, which I consider a most wasteful step. She is a very worthy woman, and my late mother acknowledged it, and amply rewarded her services. I have nothing to say against Mrs. Charles, but I can't have her at the Court. Even if she were willing to come without wages, there would be her food, an important consideration. You must clearly understand on this point I am inflexible. If you are willing to part from Mrs. Charles, and to submit to the routine of my house, Mr. Dyason has my authority to settle any debts you may owe in Paris, and to conduct you safely as far as London, and see you into the train for Norton Combe, where I will send to meet you.

"Yours truly,

"JOHN NORTON."

"I cannot do it!" came from Ruby with a sob. "I cannot do it! I have no one in the world but nurse, and I can't be parted from her."

It was precisely what Thomas Dyason had expected. He had all a young man's horror of a scene; but that did not prevent all his sympathy being with Ruby. Nurse, who had taken the letter from her child's hand, read it slowly through, and then turned to the young lawyer.

"I can't understand it, sir. Is the Squire really a poor man? Folks used to say his uncle had ten thousand a year, and we heard Mr. John came in for everything."

Tom Dyason smiled.

"You are not the first person it has puzzled, Mrs. Charles. The facts are as you say. He manages the Squire's property conjointly with his agent in Westshire. Neither Mr. Grey nor my father see cause for alarm, but the Squire asserts perpetually he is a poor man, and conscientiously acts up to the assertion."

"I won't go to him," said Ruby, defiantly. "I'd rather work for my bread!"

Thomas Dyason looked grieved.

"I am very sorry to be the person to tell you bad news, Miss Norton, but I am afraid you have no choice. Your father's will left you absolutely to his brother's guardianship. Until you come of age the Squire has full power over you."

Mrs. Charles, with rare good sense and the unselfishness of her affection, came to the rescue.

"You must go, my deary. It's hard on us both, doubly hard on me, who've no one to cling to, but this gentleman's right. You've no choice in the matter. Maybe I can get a little cottage in the village, and your uncle'll let you come and see me sometimes; and you know I shall always love you, dear, even if the sea itself were between us."

"I shall hate him," said Ruby emphatically. "He must be unbearable. I feel quite sure of it!"

The point of her going seemed settled, but her indignation was hot and strong.

Tom Dyason looked at her, and wondered what such a bright, graceful picture of girlhood would do in the grim old house where the Squire lived from one year's end to another.

"Does he live all alone?" demanded Ruby, suddenly. "Does he never go out or see anyone?"

"I really don't know," said Tom, frankly. "He comes up to London for the day sometimes, to see my father, but he never sleeps away from the Court, and never has for years. Of course he has servants and that sort of thing,

and I suppose his friends go to see him; but he doesn't give parties or balls, and the other festivities young ladies like. I am afraid you will find it terribly dull!"

Ruby opened her eyes.

"I never went to a party in my life!"

"Perhaps you are not 'out'?" suggested Thomas.

"I left school three years ago, and I suppose I was grown up then," said Ruby, absently, "but I don't know anything about 'coming out'."

"I am going to see Mr. Darby," said the young lawyer, rising, when at length it occurred to him he had paid a visit of over an hour. "Do you think you can be ready to start to-morrow?"

"And leave Nurse?"

"What must be must be, Miss Ruby," said Deborah, fondly, "and the pain won't be less for putting it off. We can be ready to-morrow nicely if it suits the gentleman, and I'd rather go by Calais, if it's all one to him, for I've a niece at Dover where I can stay for a few days till I think over my plans."

Mr. Dyason departed for the Darbys, who expressed their sentiments pretty freely when they heard the tenor of the Squire's letter.

"The man must be a brute," said the doctor.

"I said as much to my father," confessed young Dyason. "He told me such opinions were unprofessional. Not that he approves of the Squire's conduct; but he has been the legal adviser of the Nortons for years, and he doesn't like to hear his clients blamed; besides, he has a great partiality for the present master of the Court. He always says he is so much to be pitied. I own I never could understand why."

"Nor I," said the doctor, drily. "From all appearance, I should put John Norton down as that most despicable of the human species—a miser."

Mr. Thomas neither confirmed nor contradicted this opinion. He only said, thoughtfully,—

"I don't like him. I never did; but, after all, I don't think he would be unkind to his niece. It seems to me a face like hers must soften all hearts."

"Her father told her on his death-bed her face was her fortune," said the doctor. "I think the best fate for Ruby would be to marry some good fellow, who would never think the less of her because her father was a scapegrace."

"She is very beautiful!"

"And the strangest mixture of child and woman," said Mrs. Darby. "In some things I believe Ruby knows a great deal more than I do, but in others she is as innocent as a child. It is perfectly wonderful to me when I remember the queer acquaintances the Captain used to indulge in."

"She never knew half of them," said the doctor. "That old nurse has been very careful of her. Ruby is nineteen-and-a-half, but she is as ignorant as a child of flirtations and intrigue."

Mr. Dyason felt relieved at the words. Somehow he did not like to think of his temporary ward as a coquette or skilled enchantress. She was very, very pretty, and he pitied her—that was all—he told himself.

So it was all settled. Nurse spared no trouble in her preparations, and the following evening she and her young lady left the apartment in the Place Roquet, and travelled to Calais under Mr. Dyason's escort.

He was very thoughtful not to intrude on their last hours together. He, himself, travelled in a smoking-carriage, and with a handsome silver key to the guard secured their privacy. As soon as they got on board they both went below, and he paced up and down the deck, wondering a little what he should do with his charge when her old friend had left her.

After all the girl and her second mother exchanged few confidences on the journey; their hearts were almost too full. Deborah



[“MY DEAR,” MR. DABBY SAID, “YOU MUST NOT ATTACH TOO MUCH IMPORTANCE TO YOUR POOR FATHER’S LAST WORDS!”]

gave Ruby a little card, with her niece’s address written on it.

“Though I hope to be in Westshire almost as soon as you, write to me, deary. Norton Combe is my native village, and it will be hard if I cannot find some little cottage there to end my days in.”

“Nurse,” said Ruby, with dewy eyes, “we are going to be parted. Before you leave me tell me just one thing. Is my uncle a bad man?”

A simple question surely—one which asked of most people could be answered by a simple yes or no; yet Deborah, though a plain-spoken, straightforward woman, hesitated strangely over her reply.

It came at last with a strangled sob.

“I don’t know, my deary. It’s twenty years and more since I left England, and, remember, even when I lived at the Vicarage, I never saw much of him. He was not like your father, who had always a pleasant smile for everyone. Mr. John was old and grave beyond his years. I never took to him, but for all that I daren’t tell you he was a bad man. He was very good to his wife, folks said, though it was no love-match.”

Ruby felt more and more perplexed.

“But you don’t like him?”

“Maybe I don’t, Miss Ruby; but remember your mother was the light of my eyes, and I loved the Captain for her sake. Is it in nature I should favour the man who was rich while they were poor? But the past is past, Miss Ruby; and so Squire John deals well and generously by you I’m ready enough to like him.”

It was over at last. The final good-bye had been said, and Ruby was in the train speeding away to London. Mr. Dyason opposite, watching with an air of interest her pleased curiosity at all she saw.

“And this is really your first visit to England, Miss Norton? It is hard to realise it.”

“Why?”

“Because you have a perfectly English face, and you speak without the least accent, and—don’t laugh at me, please—but you are not like a French girl.”

“I wish Deborah could hear you. That has been her pet bugbear all these years—the fear that I should grow up like a French girl. Mr. Dyason, how long will it take to get to Norton Combe?”

“We are not going there to-day. I have my mother’s orders to take you to her in Bedford-square. She says you would be far too tired if you travelled to-night to Westshire. She and your grandmother were schoolfellows, though Lady Florence was much the elder of the two. My mother is nearly seventy, but she is hale and hearty still, and it will give her the greatest pleasure in the world to welcome you even for a few hours. You must know, Miss Norton, there is a strong bond between our family and yours. My father and the late Squire were boys together. My mother was married from Norton Court. The tie is such a strong one that had your uncle only told him of the sad event in time, my father would have insisted on going to Paris to attend the Captain’s funeral.”

It was still early in the forenoon when they reached Bedford-square. Thomas only stayed to introduce Ruby to a sweet, white-haired old lady, who stood in the hall to welcome them, and then hurried off to the office, where his elder brother, the real head of the firm, was a much stricter martinet than ever the kind old father had been.

“My dear,” said Mrs. Dyason, gently, when she had removed Ruby’s wraps with her own hands, and led her to the dining-room, where a late breakfast awaited her, “You are very like your mother. I could almost fancy Vera Fane had come back to us!”

“Did you know my mother?”

“I knew her well. The Vicar and my husband were old friends. We wanted Vera

to come to us on her father’s death, little thinking of all that was to happen.”

“I can only just remember her,” said Ruby, sadly; “and yet, tiny child as I was, I seemed to know she was unhappy. Since I have been grown up just the faint recollection I have of her always made me indignant with my father.”

“Yet he loved her!”

“He loved no one but himself,” said Ruby, impetuously. “Dear Mrs. Dyason, don’t think me wicked, it is quite true!”

“But you should not say it, dear!”

“That is what Deborah used to tell me. She seemed to think he might do anything because he was a gentleman and a Norton. She said the Nortons were all a little wild.”

Mrs. Dyason tried to hide a smile.

“At any rate, she was more forbearing than you, Ruby. She is a faithful, loyal-hearted creature.”

“I never was forbearing,” said Ruby, frankly. “Don’t you think, Mrs. Dyason, women are as good as men, and as much right to be happy?”

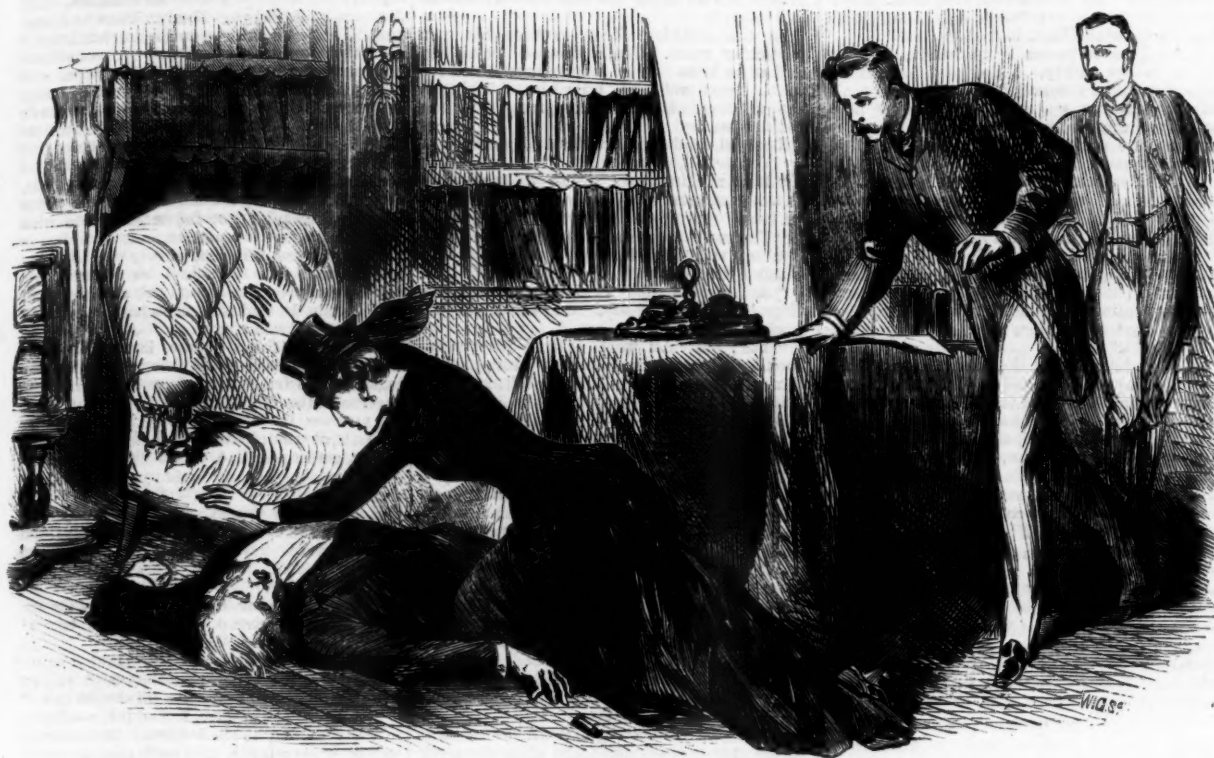
“My dear child, I never thought about it. My husband and my sons have made my life very bright. It never came into my head to ask myself whether they or I had the best right to happiness!”

“You don’t understand,” said Ruby, gravely. “Perhaps you have only had to do with good men. Deborah is fond of me; but she always seemed to think my father had a right to do just what he pleased because he was a man. Her idea was men might do anything, and women must submit.”

“You do not look to me a submissive creature, Ruby.”

“I am not,” said Ruby, stoutly. “I think I am as good as a man, and that I have as much right to be comfortable. All my life it has been dinned into me that I ought to have been a boy, just as though girls were quite inferior, worthless creatures.”

(To be continued.)



[A TERRIBLE DISCOVERY!]

NOVELLETTE.]

THE REED AND THE ROCK.

—30—

CHAPTER I.

A young girl, radiant in white silk and pearls, stands in an oriel window, chatting in a desultory fashion to a man of some five-and-twenty years—a man who is noticeable amongst his fellows, despite the fact that he barely attains the medium height. Broad shouldered and muscular, with a handsome, somewhat sallow face, keen brown eyes, and firm set mouth, he cannot be passed with a casual glance. There is pride—intense pride too—and great intellect visible in the face; and mouth and chin are alike expressive of power and determination. But just now he is smiling—and the smile is pleasant to see.

"I think, Miss Floyd, you called some magical power to your assistance; your ball is such an unequalled success."

"Thank you, Mr. Glyn; but you know I had Rex to suggest and advise; he is a host in himself."

The smile dies away as Hugo Glyn answers,—
"He should feel flattered, and doubtless is; however that may be, he is quite in his element. I never knew so thoroughly happy a fellow as he."

The girl's eyes brighten as she listens and turns her gaze upon the brilliant scene; it is not hard to find the one she seeks. He towers above every other man present, standing, as he is won't to assert, "six feet two in his stockings," and broad in proportion. Hope Floyd is very proud of her handsome, *débonnaire* lover, with his royal ways and presence; and would be highly indignant should one hint at a certain weakness of purpose, a certain instability of character, which must always prevent him achieving any great weight.

The man beside her stirs uneasily, then says in his ordinary, quiet way,—

"As a rule, balls are not in my line, but I am glad I accepted for this. It has been such an enjoyable thing to witness your pleasure."

"I'm afraid I have shown my happiness a trifle too plainly," Hope answers. "But I am literally brimming over with it. Every one has been so kind—and I am such a lucky girl—young, rich, beloved."

"And beautiful," adds Hugo gravely; the hot blood flushes the fair face.

"Thank you, Mr. Glyn. I am almost tempted to believe you—and—and—I know it sounds horribly vain, but sometimes I have thought, I am not quite—quite ordinary looking."

He laughs outright at the naïve confession, then says gently,—

"May this hour be the least good of all your life."

A gay voice breaks in.

"Why aren't you two dancing?" and a boy of fourteen *pirouettes* before them.

"Why aren't you in bed?" questions Hugo, languidly, "and little boys should be seen and not heard, Miss Floyd. I'm afraid this child is already beyond control."

"Oh, this is a day of license, and as a birthday comes but once a year, Bertie is making the most of it."

"Isn't she getting on in years, Mr. Glyn? Nineteen to-day, naughty nineteen!"

"Take care! take care! young man, I can't have my property decieved," and Rex Dunbar forcibly lifts the boy from his feet.

"Put me down, Goliath, it is unfair to take advantage of a little chap like me; but you big fellows are always cowards!"

"What shall I do to him, Hope? Show him the mercy he doesn't deserve?"

Bertie adroitly twists himself from the other's hold.

"Bah! You're not so strong as you think, though you are so absurdly tall."

"It is not growing like a tree
In bulk, doth make man better be."

"You hear that, Glyn?" asks Rex laughing. "What a consolation it must be to you."

Hugo laughs drily.

"It isn't new, at least some dozen well-meaning folks have offered it before. Some have told me in confidence that Napoleon was a little man, but that fact doesn't add an inch to my stature."

"Poor fellow, it is a shame to touch such a raw wound so roughly. Come, Hope, this is our waltz," and as he leads the girl away many eyes follow them admiringly, enviously.

Bertie turns to Hugo. "Doesn't Hope look jolly? But it wouldn't do to tell her so; it makes girls so conceited." But Hugo is not listening. The handsome face is a trifle stern, the eyes a thought harder, as he slowly moves away. Oh! it is hard, it is hard! to stand by whilst Rex gathers the flower he had dared to hope might be his, to follow in his triumphal wake, and smile as though the prize he has won is of no value to any other. "He cannot love her, as I do," the young man thinks bitterly; "he does not understand her. He will make her miserable." Then, with a sudden sense of self-disgust and scorn, he plunges into the whirling throng, and so for a while is lost to Bertie's sight. The music and dancing go on, and whatever Hugo thinks or feels he gives no sign. One young girl tells her partner she had no idea Mr. Glyn could be so entertaining "I used to think him so unsociable."

"I believe he is as a rule," the young man answers. "Small talk is not in his line; he worships intellect. Pity he is so small."

"And yet he impresses one as being larger than he is. I think it is something in his carriage. At all events, there is no man present who bears himself with such dignity. He looks like one having authority."

"He is a lucky fellow, a large unencumbered estate and no relatives."

"And you think the latter a cause for congratulation?" laughing. "On the contrary, I quite commiserate his extreme loneliness. I ought to marry."

"I don't think he is a marrying man. Shall we go into the conservatories, it is so hot here? Don't you think Floyd looks harassed?"

"Yes, I heard yesterday he has been speculating rather rashly. I do trust, for Hope's sake, he will be successful. Rex Dunbar can't afford to marry a poor girl," and they pass out of the crowded ball-room, where Hope is playing the part of hostess with admirable grace and ease.

Hugo Glyn is amongst the first to leave. As he shakes hands with his host, he glances keenly at the worn face, then says, "You are over-doing it, and should take a rest."

"Oh, I am all right—only a trifle worried. One or two speculations of mine have turned out badly (this in confidence). It is not an uncommon thing on 'Change, but I hope to recover my losses before two days are gone. Good-night."

And as he watches the young man to his carriage, he thinks, "Why could not he and Hope discover a mutual love? Oh my girl, my girl, I am afraid you have chosen a rotten reed to lean upon," and, sighing, he returns to his guests. It is very late, or rather very early, in the morning when he and Hope are alone. The father looks anxiously, tenderly into his daughter's beautiful face. "You have had a good time, my darling?"

"Oh yes, I have been almost delicious with my happiness. There never was so fortunate a girl as I. Everybody has conspired to please me."

"Before another birthday you will be leaving me," he says a trifle sadly. "But I shall not be far away. Only to-night Rex was talking of visiting 'The Hollies,' and then I should be within an easy walk of you."

"Things will not be the same; but it is as shame to cast a shadow over your brightness. Go to bed, my girl, it is getting late," so with a kiss and a blessing he dismisses her.

He himself cannot sleep, being weighed down by many anxieties, but not even Hope, his darling, guesses that all is not well with him. Why should he worry her needlessly? Just one lucky stroke will remedy all the evil, and then he will exercise more care in the future. His children shall never feel the sting of poverty, and thinking thus, he tosses restlessly to and fro upon his bed until the faint streak of light in the east broadens and brightens into perfect day.

Hope sees very little of her father throughout the day, and when they meet he is so cheerful, that she hardly notices his worn look and restless eyes. But Hugo, meeting him, is struck by his pallor and evident uneasiness.

"Can I help you?" he says, quietly.

"No, although I am grateful to you for your generosity. To-morrow I shall either need no help or be beyond it. I am not without hope."

"You may draw on me for any amount," with sudden and unusual helpfulness.

Mr. Floyd looks keenly at him.

"What have I done to win such goodness?"

"May I not have some remnant of philanthropy?" asks Hugo, laughing. "I am not yet beyond all human weaknesses."

"You are a good fellow, and I wish there were more like you. But I cannot take advantage of your generosity. If I have speculated madly—well, I am ruined. But if you see Hope to-day, let her learn nothing from you—there is no need to harass her."

"I will remember, although I hardly know if it is wise to keep her in ignorance. She is not a weak character, and her love for you would sustain her and teach her how to help and comfort you."

"She shall have no hour's sorrow that I can avert," steadily; and so the men part, and Mr. Floyd goes to town to learn the latest intelligence concerning stocks and shares, and the latest is not reassuring. He hardly knows how he bears himself throughout the weary hours, how he contrives to play his part. But the day ends at last, and night, which

brings no rest to him, comes with its silence and solitude.

In the morning Hope invades his own particular room. She is dressed for riding, and as he looks on her bright, lovely face the man's heart well-nigh fails him, thinking of the shadow which so soon may dim her radiant beauty.

The girl winds an arm about his neck.

"You are ill, dearest papa?"

"It is nothing but a slight indisposition," he answers, caressing her face with his hands.

"I have been very busy of late."

"You must have more help, or better still, give up this dreadful work and make me happy by staying at home with me."

"A life of idleness would not suit me, Hope," smiling faintly. "I was made for work."

"Yes; but 'All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy.' I shall stay with you, and Rex must be content with Bertie's companionship."

But for reasons of his own he will not allow this. He expects to learn his doom in a few short hours, and he cannot endure her presence at such a time. So with many a fond word, many a backward, loving look, Hope goes out into the brightness, not knowing in what wise she will see that dear face again.

After she is gone he walks restlessly to and fro, waiting with what patience he can for the advent of letters; and after an hour—in which he lives an eternity of dread—a servant brings in a number of letters and one telegram.

Mr. Floyd seized upon the latter and yet seems in no hurry to open it; for he stands before a window, looking out with unseeing eyes, longing yet fearing to learn the contents of the orange envelope.

"What an arrant coward I am!" he says, with self-reproach and anger. "I must do it sooner or later, and why not now?" So saying he tears open the envelope and reads the short, plain message.

Then a great and awful horror convulses his features, and trembling like one smitten with some sore disease, he sinks into a chair and covers his face with his hands—for he has read ruin and desolation in those few words.

In this hour of supreme agony it is not of himself he thinks, but his children—his bonny Hope, for whose sake he has toiled early and late; his boy who even now dreamed delightedly of going to Eton. How will they bear poverty? For himself he would not be afraid. He remembered the days when he was a poor man, fighting his way up against awful odds, and bearing all hardships with an obstinate courage nothing could subdue. But his love for his children makes a coward of him now. How can he face them and see fear and condemnation in their young eyes?

"Great heavens!" he cries, "I cannot bear it and live! If I were dead they would find friends amongst those I have befriended. I am best out of the way. There is no place for the self-ruined man."

Then terrible thoughts come to him, growing more and more into a fixed resolve, until in a strange, methodical way, he draws out writing materials, and with a steady hand pens his last words.

"My dear ones, I have ruined you utterly in the vain attempt to enrich you, and I can no longer endure my life. It is best for you that I should end it here, and now I pray you to think as little harshly as you can of the father who loved you to your undoing, and his own. You, my dear daughter, will find a comforter in Rex Dunbar. Let him marry you as soon as convenience allows; and, my boy, for your sister's sake be brave. I leave you to the care of my sister, Sabina Thompson. We have not met for many years, but she will be good to you for my sake. I believe there is enough left to satisfy my creditors—that is if the house and land fetch a fair price—keep nothing back, for I would like

my name to be remembered as stainless. My dear ones, good-bye. Heaven bless and keep you. Heaven comfort you in your affliction."

In the same methodical way he reads what he has written, then folding the paper and addressing it to Hope, he rises and crosses the room. Unlocking a small medicine chest, he takes out a phial containing a colourless liquid. His hand shakes a moment and his face grows, if possible, more ashen, this step he contemplates is so terrible, so irrevocable, and then gathering all his courage, he pours the liquid drop by drop into a glass, and with one last prayer for pardon, one last loving thought for his children, slowly and deliberately drinks it. A little later the servants are alarmed by the sound of a heavy fall, and rushing in find him stretched prone upon the floor, stiff and rigid.

One drives for a doctor, knowing all the while it is useless, and the others gather together in a frightened group, wondering who shall tell Miss Hope the sad news, and what worse woe is to follow. Then another suggests communicating with Hugo, and the butler, glad to shift a terrible duty from his own shoulders, at once acts upon the suggestion.

Hugo arrived almost as soon as the doctor, and it needs but a glance to tell him Algernon Floyd is dead—beyond all human prayers and tears.

"This is terrible," the young man says. "I wish any other had been chosen for the task. Upon my soul, I don't know how to meet Miss Floyd. Where is she?"

"Out-riding, sir, with Mr. Dunbar; poor young lady, she set out in such high spirits. I'm afraid to think how she'll take the news."

Hugo paces to and fro, to and fro, wondering in what fashion he shall convey the calamity to her, wondering if she will read the worst in his face, before he can speak, and when the little party appears in sight, he is strongly tempted to evade meeting it. But he is a brave man; then, too, he loves Hope, so he goes out into the hall where Bertie accosts him in a high, merry voice, and Hope looks a trifle surprised at his appearance there.

"Where is papa?" she asks, "have you not found him in?"

"He is in, but you cannot go to him just now, Miss Floyd. Dunbar, can you give me a few minutes private conversation?"

Something in his manner alarms the girl.

"You know something about papa that you will not tell me! Is he ill, or has he had bad news?"

"Dear friend, do not agitate yourself—he is ill."

"Then my place is beside him," and she turns to leave them hurriedly.

"For Heaven's sake stop her!" whispers Hugo, "he is dead!" but before Rex can grasp the awful fact, Hope has darted towards her father's room, and her hand is on the door. It is Hugo who catches and holds her forcibly.

"Not yet, not yet, Hope, wait a little until you are calmer. Oh, you poor child, you poor child! How can I tell you all?"

"I know," she cries wildly. "I know he is dead. Oh, my father, oh, my father!" and tearing herself away from him, enters the silent room, one glance tells her all. There is the half-empty phial, a faint, peculiar odour fills the room, and with an inarticulate cry she runs forward, and falling on the dead man's breast means out piteous, passionate words.

CHAPTER II.

It is all over now, the last sad rites have been performed, and the mourners are gathered together in the large drawing-room.

There is no will to read, no instructions with regard to Hope and Bertie, save that the latter shall go with his aunt to her distant home.

The orphans sit side by side, Hope clasping

the boy's hand fast within her own; at a little distance from her, looking moody and uneasy, is Rex Dunbar; by an open window sits Hugo, but the most prominent seats are occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Thompson.

The former is a pettifoggish lawyer, and when she married him Sabina Floyd esteemed herself fortunate; but as her brother rose from step to step up the social ladder, she grew discontented, and envious of his success.

She is not at all sorry to be able to patronise her niece, and does so in such an obvious fashion, that Hugo is tempted to take up the cudgels in Hope's defence.

"Well," Mr. Thompson is saying, "my time is very precious, and I cannot afford to waste any more of it, so I propose that we get to business and settle matters at once. We must return to Stordale to-morrow."

"Yes, indeed; and before we go we are anxious to hear what Mr. Dunbar intends doing. Of course, Hope, we are willing to receive you at Stordale until the wedding takes place, provided that is shortly."

Hope glances deprecatingly at Rex, who flushes, and will not meet the glances of those sweet, sad eyes.

"You must understand," he says, "that I am not by any means a rich man; and, as I have already exceeded my half-yearly allowance, our marriage must be delayed for a short while. But I prefer discussing these matters alone with Hope."

Mr. Thompson regards him keenly.

"I hope, sir," with a queer assumption of dignity, "I hope you don't intend withdrawing from your engagement simply because of my niece's altered circumstances."

"I decline to answer such unwarranted speeches. Hope shall acquaint you with the result of our interview."

Hugo says nothing, but silently watches the faces before him, with a growing scorn upon his own.

"Well, of course, we can do nothing until Mr. Dunbar decides, but I must say, Hope, your lover does not seem very eager to lose his freedom. Now, if you please, James, we will speak of Bertie—he goes with us."

"Yes; I can doubtless find him work in the office; of course, I shall not maintain him in idleness."

"Uncle," Hope begins, in a trembling way, "Uncle, spare Bertie to me a little while, until we have got used to the idea of parting; perhaps we shall have no need to part," and she holds the boy's hand firmer yet.

"Nonsense; if a thing is to be done let it be done at once; and surely you would not go against your father's expressed wish."

"Bertie is so young, uncle, and the change you propose for him is so great—"

"Beggars must not be choosers," her aunt breaks in; "and Bertie should be grateful that your uncle shows him so much kindness. Doubtless he has been bred to extravagant ideas, but he must learn to forget them."

Then Hugo speaks for the first time.

"Let the boy stay with me awhile, until the first bitterness of the change has passed."

"Thank you, sir; but he must come at once or not at all."

"Hops! Hope!" the boy cries, with a sudden sob, "don't send me away; let me live with you and Rex. I don't care how poorly I am dressed and fed, but I can't, I won't leave you!"

"Hush, hush, dear! Be patient a little," the poor girl answers, with quivering lips. "If you go it will be only for a short time. When—when I have a home of my own, you shall share it."

"Doubtless, Master Floyd considers a place in my home, a stool in Mr. Thompson's office, very unacceptable, but I am afraid he will be compelled to accompany me, there being no other home open to him."

"Pardon, you forget that I shall be glad to receive Bertie at once, and for an indefinite time."

"Your kindness is very becoming to you, Mr. Glyn; but I fancy I know what is best for

the boy, and as he is my ward (by his father's wish), I shall certainly claim my rights. You will please be ready to start at 10.30 to-morrow, Bertie."

The boy scowls sullenly, and makes no reply, but Hope answers for him.

"If he must go, uncle, he shall not keep you waiting;" then to Bertie, "It is our father's wish, dear, do not oppose it; and try—oh, try—to believe all is for the best."

She breaks down there, incapable of further speech, and Mrs. Thompson shaking out her stiff black skirts, rises.

"Come, James, we will leave these young people to settle matters together; perhaps, Mr. Glyn, you will stay with us. We dine at six, and shall dispense with all ceremony."

Hugo is tempted to decline, but his anxiety with regard to Hope, induces him to remain; so he saunters into the gardens, there to await the summons to dinner, and Hope finds herself alone with her lover.

As he does not attempt to approach her, she goes to him with new-born timidity in her manner, and says, with an appealing glance,—

"Won't you speak to me, Rex?"

"What can I say?" he questions miserably, taking one little slender hand in his. "Upon my word, Hope, these recent terrible events have quite bewildered me."

"I know, I know; but unfortunately I realise them too keenly. Rex, dear Rex, do not think me unreasonably; but—but you see what sort of people my relatives are, and how they will insist upon some definite arrangement being made. Oh! forgive me! forgive me! but what is to become of me?"

The handsome face is flushed with confusion and anger that fate should be so hard with him, and Hope notices, with a chill of fear, he does not offer to draw her close, or use any of those caressing phrases common to him in his intercourse with her.

"How I envy Glyn; if only I stood in his shoes we would be married without delay, and laugh at your people's claim to Bertie. As it is—as it is—you know how miserably I am situated; I cannot do what I would. Hope, I am afraid our marriage must be postponed."

If she experienced a thrill of disappointment she hid it bravely.

"You know best; and—and poverty is so new to me I hardly understand yet all that it entails. What do you advise? Shall I try for a situation as governess or companion?"

The hot blush of shame rushes to his face. "Is there no place where you can stay until—until we can see our way clearly? My mother is not well enough to entertain."

"No," Hope says, sadly, "although hitherto I have been a welcome guest, despite her ailments. Do you think, Rex, I am quite blind to the change in my friends? I am learning very quickly that I was loved not for myself, but for my fancied possessions!"

"Don't, Hope; you make things harder for me by your suspicions. Perhaps you will accuse me next of mercenary motives. As for my mother, she is really ill. But I have been thinking, perhaps Clarice Page will take you in for a short time."

"I have asked, and been denied!" bitterly. "Although Clarice was my dearest friend; the house is full of visitors, there is no room for me; and then followed the usual polite regrets. Oh, Rex! Oh, Rex! I am all alone in the world save for you. I think my heart is breaking!"

And as her composure suddenly gives way, and she clings to him like a child in her despair and desolation, he catches her close, and kisses her madly, knowing that after this hour they will never stand together thus, that she will never believe in his love or loyalty again.

"Comfort me," she cries, wildly. "Comfort me, my darling, I am mad with my woe!"

"Sweetheart! Sweetheart! I have no comfort to give. I am the wretchedest of men, and yet Heaven knows I love you!"

Ay, but he loves himself more dearly, as she is yet to learn, poor child.

"Could you not go to Stordale for a little while?" hurriedly; I know it would not be comfortable—but—but—"

"I could bear it for Bertie's sake; and oh! Rex, you will leave me long to eat the bread of charity. I cannot obey you in this one thing—if—if—we are to wait years before you can bring me home, I will at once seek some way to support myself."

It seemed so utterly cruel to him that this young and delicately-nurtured girl should go out to wage a weary fight to the world; and for the life of him, he cannot tell her the cruel truth. She will hear it soon enough, and from other lips than his.

So he says, "It shall not be long, Hope. Cannot you trust me?" and wonders meanwhile what his people will say when they learn the engagement still exists.

"Of course," he says, after a pause, "we cannot hope to rent 'The Hollies' now; when we begin life together it must be on a very modest scale. I don't know how you will like practising economy."

"I shall like it—if, indeed, you are not afraid," Hope says in a brighter tone; "and I won't murmur at going to Stordale, when you have promised to follow me soon. Very possibly, too, I may be useful to Aunt Sabina."

"Don't let her transform you into a drudge. She is a hard, vulgar, old woman, and I hate to think you must accept her hospitality; but there is no help for us!"

Then he draws her down beside him, and talks such lover's nonsense as brings the flush to her pale young face, the light to her heavy eyes; and both start guiltily when the gong sounds.

Hugo glances keenly from one to the other as they enter the dining-room; but their faces tell him nothing.

Mrs. Thompson, however, has no delicacy, and asks with some asperity, "Well, what arrangements have you made?"

Rex answers glibly, "I must ask you to receive Hope for a few weeks until I have settled everything here, then I will come down to Stordale and carry her off."

"I trust that will not be long, as I do not approve of young girls living in idleness," and having planned another sting in her niece's heart, she seats herself composedly at the head of the table, and does the honours in a stiff, ungracious way, which augurs ill for Hope's future comfort. It is a silent and uncomfortable meal; but it ends at last, and Hugo, excusing himself on the plea of business, takes his leave, accompanied by Rex.

"You will want time for your packing, Hope," her aunt has said, "so that you had best dismiss Mr. Dunbar until the morning. We shall expect you to breakfast, sir, as Mr. Thompson will wish for a little private conversation with you."

As they leave the grounds behind them Hugo turns suddenly to his companion.

"Dunbar, you fully intend to go through with this engagement; despite the opposition of your people?"

"Of course I do!" shortly; "but things are done unpleasant for me all round; and as my income barely suffices for myself, I am at a loss to know how two will exist upon it. What a blind fool Floyd was to speculate as he did!"

"And what a clever fellow he would have been had his speculations succeeded!" sneers Hugo; "or if only he had been satisfied with the excellent settlements made upon his daughter!"

"Don't adopt that tone, Glyn. You can't guess what a fix I am in. Why, I already am indebted to the tune of five thousand, and how the deuce I am to clear myself I cannot imagine."

Just a moment Hugo does battle with himself. It is hard to help another to win the woman he covets for himself; but the victory won he turns to Rex, —

"If five thousand will free you, it is yours unconditionally; or, if more is needed, say so. I cannot face the idea of that poor girl's life at Stordale."

"You're a brick, Glyn; but I dare not accept your offer. I could never repay you. Many thanks; but I must find or make a way out of my difficulties for myself."

CHAPTER III.

HOPKINS has been settled at Stordale just a month, and her life there has not been among roses. Mrs. Thompson has no idea of supporting her without some very satisfactory return, and finding Hope is a genius with her needle, employs her to decorate the house with specimens of elaborate work, gives her old garments to re-make, appoints her to perform little menial services from sunrise to sunset, all the while regaling her with stories of her own benevolence, and expatiating on Hope's good fortune in possessing such worthy and generous relatives. Bertie too, is a source of great trouble, many and bitter are his complaints against his hard lot, many (and well-deserved) his uncle's reproaches. It is vain for Hope to plead and expostulate, the boy's selfishness is beyond pleadings and reasonings—and he deliberately plans how best to annoy the lawyer and his wife.

Then, too, Rex writes most unsatisfactory letters at rare intervals, and but for her pride Hope would break utterly down.

Early one September morning, as she sits alone engaged in some intricate needlework, a visitor arrives, who is closeted some time with Mrs. Thompson, and the girl is wondering who this early caller may be, when her aunt joins her.

"Hope, put up your work and go to the best parlour."

"Has he come?" the girl questions, rising flushed and trembling.

"If you mean that fellow Dunbar, no? It is Mr. Glyn and he wishes for a little private conversation. He seems a worthy young man, although in my young days, it would have been considered improper to demand a personal interview with so mere a girl as yourself."

Hope hardly hears the conclusion of her speech, as filled with strange new hope she hurries from the room. But when she confronts Hugo, and sees the pity and tenderness on his face, her heart dies within her.

"You have brought me bad news," she says scarcely above a whisper; "tell me at once—I cannot bear suspense."

He takes her hands in his, looking down at her drooped face, with infinite love and compassion in his eyes, then he says in a hard voice, "Yes, I do bring bad news, Hope. I wish it had fallen to any other to perform this task. My poor girl! my poor girl! he is false to you."

She catches her breath sharply, and the beautiful, brown eyes, dilated and wild, are lifted to his in agonised entreaty. "It is not true," she gasps, "oh! friend, tell me it is not true?"

"I wish to Heaven I could," he answers, feeling her anguish is making him weak, and growing angry with himself for his weakness. "I only heard it last night, and I hurried here this morning to acquaint you with the news, knowing, as I did, that any hope you entertained of marriage with him must be vain."

"Perhaps," she falters, "perhaps there is some mistake? You may have misunderstood, but her heart tells her this man would not speak without good authority."

"Unfortunately there is no mistake," he says, still schooling himself to calmness; "Mr. Dunbar's engagement to Miss Page was made public yesterday."

"He is engaged to Clarice?" with extreme bitterness; "she should have waited until he was off with the old love. Oh!" wildly, "oh! what shall I do? How shall I bear it? Of all my friends, of all I loved and trusted,

there is not one loyal to me in my poverty and loneliness."

"Hope, you wrong me."

"Do I? I hardly know. You see—you see I esteemed myself—favoured of the gods, loved not for what I could give or do, but for myself—and—oh, Heaven! I learn I am less than nothing to any of my so-called friends," and suddenly sinking into a chair she hides her face with her hands, but cannot weep.

He crosses to her, and lays his hands upon her shoulders. "Hope, so long as I live you cannot be alone. My dear, I know it is a cruel thing to speak to you now of love, but I am cruel to be kind. Will you be my wife? I know your past, I know you care less than nothing for me now, but I will teach you to love me, if only you will give me yourself."

She looks up in pain and amazement.

"Oh, Mr. Glyn! I did not dream—"

"That I loved you!" he interrupts, with some show of bitterness; "but the fact remains the same. There is nothing to recommend me to you but my affection; and, at least, I can remove you from an uncongenial home. Hope, it sounds like bribing you, but I cannot resist the temptation of showing you how much marriage with me would mean for Bertie. He shall be as my own brother to me!"

"Hush!" she cries, trembling violently. "You are wronging yourself and me! A loveless wife would not content you. I know you too well to believe that! And—and I dare not marry you, loving him! Oh! I wish you had not told me this! then, at least, I might have kept one friend!"

He is silent a moment; then he says, gravely and quietly,—

"You will always have one in me. I am sorry you have answered in such a fashion; but you doubtless know best. But, if at any time you should alter your decision—"

"Oh! do not think I could! I have found that even lovers may deceive! and I do not believe I could trust any human creature now!"

"And what do you intend doing? You can't stay here," with a disparaging glance round.

"No; I must find work to do; and, if you are my friend indeed, you will help me."

"What can you do?" gently. "You have been too delicately nurtured to fight successfully with the world. There are but two occupations open to you, and I am not sure that either would be congenial. You are sufficiently accomplished to teach young children, or you could fill the post of companion, but, as a rule, the salary is a mere trifle—a great deal less than a cook commands."

"Do not discourage me; let me go away and earn a home for Bertie and myself. I can't stay here! I cannot endure these daily indignities and unkindnesses!"

"Then they are unkind to you?" in a tone of suppressed anger.

"Do they look like kindly people?" bitterly. "Oh! if you only guessed how bitter the bread of dependence can be made! I wish myself dead a hundred times a day! But for Bertie, I should have gone away weeks ago; but I could not leave him."

"If you obtain a situation you must; and I do not think a little rough-experience will hurt the boy; but I promise, in any case, to keep watch over him."

"Oh! you are good! you are good! You almost tempt me to believe that there may be one amongst all I know wholly loyal and staunch!"

"I am not good at protesting, but I shall not fail you now or ever. And if, indeed, you are resolved to earn your bread, I will exert myself to find some suitable home for you. But, Hope, on the other hand, my house is waiting a mistress."

"No, no!" distressfully. "You must make some other woman your wife! I must not listen to you; but I thank you for the honour you have done me!"

He rises, and, sighing a little, says,—

"And I thank you for your candour, and will try to school myself to contentment. Now I will leave you; but you will hear from me shortly. And have you any message for Mr. Dunbar?"

She trembles a moment, and her pale face grows paler, but she answers firmly,—

"Yes. Tell him I have heard of his engagement, and congratulate him upon it; that I trust he and she will be very happy. And—if he asks you how I looked and acted, say that—that I evinced no surprise and no pain; that I thought the arrangement a wise and suitable one."

"You poor girl! I will carry your message faithfully. It may be, however, that he will attempt to see you."

"He will find me quite prepared for an interview!" proudly. "The past few weeks have done much to harden me! It is not true that affliction softens one, although that is the orthodox belief. For all your goodness I thank you; and—good-bye, Mr. Glyn!"

"Let it be Hugo from to-day, seeing that we are friends."

"Good-bye, Hugo! When you fail me, I shall indeed be alone! Good-bye!"

And when he is gone she sinks down, covering her tortured face, trying to think how best she shall bear the heavy burden of life.

In this first hour of anguish she has no tears with which to ease her heart. No moan breaks from the pallid lips. She makes no gesture of despair. Until now she had not believed herself capable of bitterness, of such passionate, useless revolt against fate, and she is almost afraid of herself. It hurts her maidenly pride too to remember how plainly she showed her love, how passionately she had responded to her lover's caresses.

"He and Clarice may laugh together now over my infatuation," she thinks. "He never could have loved me—it was my fortune tempted him. Oh! what a blind fool I have been!"

But just in this one thing she wronged her quondam lover. He loved her as well as men of his calibre can love, and hates himself for the part he has played; thinks miserably that life can never be goodly again, he having lost her.

Essentially selfish, as good-tempered men often are, he determined to see her once before he was indissolubly bound to Clarice Page. He must plead her forgiveness, must look into those dear eyes, listen to that sweet, low voice once again; and when he has bidden her good-bye he will go back to his gilded thralldom.

So just three days later he presents himself at Theophrastus House and asks for Miss Floyd.

Fortunately for him both Mr. and Mrs. Thompson are away from home, and he is ushered into a gloomy-looking room, where he is presently joined by Hope.

She is paler and thinner than she used to be, and something of sweetness and tenderness has gone from her proud, young face.

He regards her in miserable and embarrassed silence—he feels such a despicable hound under the cold regard of those dark eyes; and seeing he will not or cannot speak Hope says,—

"This is an ill-advised visit, Mr. Dunbar. May I ask if Miss Page is acquainted with it?"

"She is not. Hope, say a kind word to a poor wretch! You don't know what my life is without you—but what could I do, fettered as I am? I love you, upon my soul I do, but we could not live on love."

"Pray do not think it necessary to excuse your conduct—being so much in love with wealth, there was no other course open to you. But I am glad my father cannot know this thing. You see he trusted your honour, and believed I should be safe in a good man's home."

"Don't," he cries, going nearer and attempting to touch her, "I cannot bear your scorn."

Her face hardens, the sweet lips curve disdainfully, in her strength and pride she can but despise this man, even though she loves him yet.

"I know I have hurt you cruelly and spoilt your life," he begins, but she interrupts him swiftly.

"That you have hurt me I do not deny; that you have spoilt my life is a great error on your part. Since I heard the news—that my lover and my friend had combined to betray me—I have been learning to think that 'my blessing lay in your forsaking.' I did not see you as you are; the man I loved was foolishly idealised, foolishly revered—but that is over now."

"You mean that you hate me?"

"No; if you were stronger perhaps I should."

He catches her hands, and holding them against her will, says,—

"You are hard, very hard! You used no to be. Hope, look at this matter in another light. My allowance is not sufficient for my own wants, how then will it maintain two? I have no profession, and if we married there would be nothing before us but genteel poverty."

"And poverty is a sin? Please to loose my hands, Mr. Dunbar; and there is no more to be said on this subject. You will go your way and I mine. In all probability we shall not meet again, so let me say now that I fully and freely forgive you the wrong you have done me, and trust you may be as happy with Clarice as you once planned to be with me."

"That is impossible; and there you will have your revenge."

"I wish for none. And surely a man may please himself in his choice of a wife, although it would certainly be best if he were quite sure of his mind before choosing."

He winces under her quiet words, then says, lamely,—

"I know that you are the only woman I shall ever care for. I am false only in deed, never in heart."

She smiles wearily, disdainfully.

"I cannot follow you in these nice distinctions. I only realize the bare fact of your infidelity—that is all-sufficient. And now, if you please, we will part."

"Not enemies, Hope?"

"Neither friends nor enemies, but strangers from this hour. It is best so."

"It is not best. How can you be so cruel? Let us meet occasionally, Hope—dear Hope—I shall be a better fellow for your friendship."

"And Clarice would be so happy knowing we met! No, I will not see you any more of my free will; and apparently you forget I shall not move in your circle, that I am no longer Hope Floyd the beloved and admired heiress, but Hope Floyd the poor, desolate orphan, who, to live, must work."

"I cannot bear it," he cries, vehemently and shamefacedly. "It is too cruel! When—when I am married you must let me assist you. I owe you so much."

The brown eyes open wide upon him.

"As a sort of recompense for my wounded feelings, my supposed spoiled life. I am very poor, but I have not lost my pride."

"You leave me nothing to do, no way of reparation is open to me; you are as pitiless to yourself as to me. Dear heart, what can I say to move you?"

"Say nothing but good-bye."

"Kiss me once, Hope," he urges, miserably, drawing closer to her.

"No, no! never any more! never any more!" she cries, with sudden wildness.

He catches her in his arms, and holds her fast, whilst he madly kisses her lips and brow, feeling in this one moment of anguish that the world would be well lost for her dear sake.

She struggles out of his embrace, and sinking down, covers her face with her hands, and trembles violently.

"My darling, my darling!" he says, "the

sacrifice is too great, I cannot make it! Let what will come, we will be happy together!"

She looks at him with streaming eyes, no longer resentful or scornful, only full of pity for his weakness and his pain.

"No, no!" she says, very gently. "I know you better now than you know yourself, and, Rex, you cannot bear poverty. If you would really wish to do me some service, forget me, and—make Clarice happy. When I hear of you, let the report be good."

"I dare not promise," he answers, relieved, yet miserable that she had refused to avail herself of that moment's madness. "You were my good angel, and I have lost you by my own act. I am 'unstable as water,' a mere reed shaken by every wind that blows, constant in nothing but my love for you, and even that I dare not openly cleave to."

Such sweeping self-accusations are apt to be spasmodic, and of little worth, but if Hope thinks thus she makes no sign, she knows too well he is confessing the truth. But she rises and lays one little hand upon his arm.

"I was very hard to you. I am so changed since my troubles came. Forget all my cruel words, and with them me. I will kiss you now, dear, in memory of the old days—the old love."

Just one moment her sweet lips touched his brow, then she slips away from him. "Good-bye, and Heaven bless you," and he has no word of farewell to say, afraid as he is that all his manhood will forsake him, knowing as he does, that with his own hands he has plucked down the walls of the fair palace of Love.

In silence he goes, leaving this woman he loves to do battle with a world suddenly grown cruel to her, faithless to every vow, to his manhood, ashamed and degraded in his own eyes.

And the poor girl bears her anguish with that strange new strength, which has come to her of late; pities Rex, prays for him, mourns over him, and believes her whole life is laid waste; hardly understands as yet that her blessing does indeed "lie in his forsaking," or that her love is of other quality than in the days which have gone before.

CHAPTER IV.

"MY DEAR HOPE,—I have succeeded in obtaining a situation which I have no doubt you can fill; a friend of mine, a Mrs. Courtney, requires a daily governess for two small children. The salary is not immense—a pound a week, and as her house is very small you would have to sleep out. She, however, can recommend you to suitable apartment or apartments, as you please, but as your days from ten to four would be spent with your pupils, one room perhaps would suffice, if not, further arrangements must be made. I daresay Mrs. Courtney will be willing to agree to any terms, as you go to her highly commended. If you accept, please notify me to that effect, and I will meet you at Finsbury, which is your nearest station, and convey you to your new home.—Always yours sincerely, "Hugo."

"A nice, sensible letter," says Mrs. Thompson laying it aside, "and you will be mad to refuse so generous an offer."

"I do not intend doing so, aunt," quietly.

"I only trust I may give satisfaction."

"There is no doubt of that," with newborn graciousness, "and Hope, as Mr. Dunbar has behaved so shamefully, if you are wise, you will try to increase the interest Mr. Glyn feels for you. Oh! it is useless to look so indignant—all women hope to marry sooner or later, and when you get a good chance, don't throw it away because of sentimental memories. As mistress of Glyndale of course you could do much for Bertie."

To this Hope makes no reply, and the elder woman scarcely seems to expect one, for her stream of small talk flows on smoothly.

"Fifty pounds seems a large salary to pay a daily governess? But I suppose your former

position has something to do with the price you command, really if you are careful you should be able to put by something for a rainy day."

To Hope, so long accustomed to an unlimited supply of cash, fifty pounds appears an absurdly small sum with which to provide food, clothing, and all the trivial necessities of life; but still it is far more than she had expected to receive, so despite Bertie's loud wailings, she writes, accepting Mrs. Courtney's offer and prepares for her journey.

"My dear," says Mrs. Thompson, "what a fortunate thing it is you are so well supplied with dresses; in six months you may alight your mourning, in six more you can wear some of these pretty costumes, which will look quite new with a little alteration. Really you should save half—quite half—of your first year's salary."

The parting with Bertie comes all too soon, and is very painful. The boy reproaches her in no measured terms that she can have the heart to leave him lonely in such a house, and utterly refuses to return her good-bye kiss, and Hope starts broken-heartedly upon her journey.

Hugo meets her at Finsbury, and his mere presence is a comfort and support to her, he tells her a few particulars with regard to her new life, and assures her that Mrs. Courtney is quite prepared to like her. But he does not say that he is responsible for half her salary, or that he has agreed to rent a sitting-room for her, leaving her charged only with the expense of a bed chamber. He would have been more liberal had he dared, but he was afraid of rousing Hope's suspicions and so ruining his whole scheme of resisting her.

"And when do my duties commence?" she asks as they bow towards her lodgings.

"To-morrow if you please, and, as you are a stranger in this Babylon, I intend escorting you to Maida House and introducing you. But as I am nothing if not mercenary, I shall ask for a reward."

"It must not be too exorbitant," smiling faintly.

"You must invite me to tea at your rooms. I'll give you time to rest and all that sort of thing, before I turn up. May I come at six? I know it isn't etiquette, but I think, Hope, we can afford to laugh at Mrs. Grundy."

"Oh, yes; I shall be glad to receive you. I do not find my own company entertaining. I am afraid your evening will be very dull, Mr. Glyn."

"I thought we were to dispense with ceremony, Miss Floyd?" with a comical glance.

"I beg your pardon, but it is all so new. I shall learn to do better in future, Hugo."

"I hope so; well this is home, Hope, the exterior is less promising than the interior; I shall not go in with you now, because you need rest, but you may expect me to-morrow morning at nine-thirty. Good-bye."

Here the door of number eight was opened, and an elderly woman of comfortable appearance comes forward to meet the girl.

"You look tired, miss," she says civilly.

"No doubt you've had a long journey. But when you've taken off your wraps, and washed you'll feel better. There's a fire in your parlour, and your tea is quite ready. Follow me, please, and I'll show you your rooms, the man will see to the luggage."

Hope is agreeably surprised by the appearance of her apartments, they are deliciously clean and sweet, and very prettily furnished (Hugo had insisted upon re-furnishing them), but this of course she does not know.

"I hope you are satisfied, miss," says Mrs. Barton, glancing appreciatively at the pretty pale face. "I've taken a deal of trouble over the rooms."

"I am quite sure you have, and they are very, very pretty indeed."

"I'm glad you think so, miss. Now I will leave you, and as soon as you're ready, tea will be served. Mr. Glyn was particular about that miss, and sent in all the neces-

saries," and with a keen look at the half-averted, blushing face she hurries out.

Hope spends a quiet evening, retiring early, to wake refreshed in the morning; and, true to his word Hugo appears at nine-thirty, and escorts her to Maida House. She found Mrs. Courtney pleasant in ways and words. The children neither below nor above the average child in ability or sweetness of disposition. And so she settles down to her new life, of which she writes full details to Bertie; but the boy's replies are unsatisfactory, and Hope suffers much anxiety on his account; but she says little to Hugo who is inclined (she thinks) to be severe on her brother.

He is a very frequent visitor; indeed, Mrs. Burton, the worthy landlady, is quite convinced that "Miss Floyd will very shortly change her name."

One day, when Hope had been three months in her new home, she was considerably startled by the receipt of a telegram from her aunt, running thus: "Bertie has left Stordale; is he with you?" Having wired a reply in the negative she goes to her daily duties in an agony of anxiety and dread; Rose and Mary wonder a little over her unusual inattention, and naturally take advantage of it.

It seems to the poor girl that the day will never end, that she will never be free to begin her search for the lad left to her love and care. "I should never have left him," she says, self-reproachfully. "Poor boy! it is such an uncongenial home."

At last, however, her labours end, and she starts hurriedly homewards, Hugo meeting her on the way.

"You are ill or harassed," he says, gravely, "tell me what has gone wrong."

For answer she places Mrs. Thompson's telegram in his hand, and, having read it, he turns hopefully to her.

"I think I may tell you safely to keep a good heart. Bertie isn't a likely sort of boy to court hardship. No doubt you will find him installed in your easiest chair, and quite happy in his new-found freedom."

"Hugo you are not angry with him? He is so young, so unused to poverty or unkindness. You will not be hard with him?"

She spoke so wistfully, so entreatingly, that he had no heart to answer as wisdom dictated.

"My dear Hope, I will be everything you wish, rather than add to your troubles. And if our runaway turns up we must devise some means to insure his happiness; rest assured I will do my best."

"I know you will," gratefully. "You are more good to me than I dared to hope."

They have reached her lodgings, and now she pauses. "If he is here, I would like to see him first; to-morrow he will be glad to meet you. Please let us hear what Mrs. Burton has to tell us."

At this juncture the landlady opens the door.

"Oh, miss!" she says hurriedly and relievedly, "I'm so glad you've come. There's a young gentleman upstairs who says he is your brother, and that he has run away from his guardian!"

"Please tell him I am home, and will join him soon. Good-bye, Hugo. I cannot ask you in now."

"I am not so unreasonable as to wish it, my dear," gently. "But, Hope, will you listen to my advice, and try to act upon it?"

"Yes."

"Then be firm with Bertie; he is at a critical age, and injudicious kindness will be his ruin; good-bye, my dear, I shall walk with you to Maida House in the morning."

She smiles her thanks and goes in, upstairs to the room Hugo has made so pretty for her sake, and there (as Hugo predicted) in the easiest of chairs, sat Bertie, fast asleep, with his head drooped upon his arms.

Her sweet eyes fill with tears of love and pity as they rest on the motherless, fatherless lad; how can she be wise when heart aches with its weight of yearning tenderness.

Crossing swiftly and lightly, she bends and kisses the short clustering curls.

"Bertie, dear, I have come home." "And about time, too," he says, peevishly, rousing himself to look at her. I've been alone for hours, and got so hipped that I'd very nearly determined to go off without seeing you. I don't suppose, however, you would have cared."

"Not cared! Oh, Bertie! dear, I could not leave Maida House until my work was over. But now let me get you some tea, and afterwards you shall tell me all."

"I don't want to eat; the old woman got me some dinner, but while you eat and drink I'll talk. Weren't you surprised to see me?"

"No, because Aunt Thompson telegraphed you were missing. Bertie, dear, was life so hard there you could not bear it?"

"Should I have run away had I been comfortable?" petulantly. "Did I ever know a peaceful hour there? I tell you I made tracks because I couldn't stand it any longer."

"Do you remember, dear, a certain poem which exhorts us to suffer and be strong, because that is divine?"

"Fiddlesticks! don't preach to a fellow; I had enough of such nonsense at Stordale. The fact is, Hope, I cheeked old Thompson, and he boxed my ears; then I bolted."

"And now what will you do without our uncle's assistance?"

"I shall stay with you until I get something to do—some gentlemanly work. I won't sit all day long and all my life in a pettifogging lawyer's office. If you forget I am a gentleman I can't and don't!"

"We are only make-believe gentlefolk at best, dear," gently. "We are of the people, and only our recent wealth won us entrance into society. Then, too, I fancy Mr. Thompson can compel you to return."

"I won't," flatly. "I'll die first. If you had a grain of love for me you wouldn't wish it; and if you wish me to go, say so at once, and I won't intrude here longer!"

"Bertie! Bertie! how can you say such cruel things, dear? Be patient and to-morrow we will talk matters over with Mr. Glyn."

"I won't be dictated to by him," the boy says, querulously. "He is bound to side with old Thompson and persuade you to send me back."

"You shall not return unless you wish, I promise you that, Bertie," Hope answers, a little wearily, "and Mr. Glyn was always most good to you. But tell me, dear, have you any particular desire to follow any trade?"

"Trade! no; but I would like to be a midshipman."

"That costs a great deal of money."

"I know, but if old Thompson wasn't so stingy, he would supply it, and we could pay it back soon or late. Now, don't talk any more business; I'm tired of it; and I say, Hope, we'll have a jolly day to-morrow night-seeing."

"You forget, Bertie, I am not my own mistress; but we will go somewhere in the evening, then you will have a chance of talking things over with Mr. Glyn."

"Alright, Hope, do you know that cad Danbar is back from his honeymoon. I trust he'll find out Clarice has got a fine temper of her own; he ought to suffer for his treatment of you."

"Don't, dear, I am not angry, why should you be? Sometimes I am not even sorry. Now I have a few accounts to do for Mrs. Courtney, those ended, I am quite at your service."

In the morning she talks seriously with Hugo of the boy's future, and is disappointed and hurt that he should regard Bertie's conduct as selfish and cowardly; but he consoles her by promising to "look after" him through the day, and, returning to her lodgings, invites the youngster "to do" some of the sights with him.

He is so genial, apparently so eager to amuse the boy, that Bertie quite forgets his

fear of him, and spends an enjoyable time. It is not until they are going homewards that Hugo touches on the subject so present in his mind.

"Bertie, I suppose you know we ought to pack you off to Stordale?" "But you won't do it!" confidently, "for Hope's sake! She has promised I shall not go back, and Hope don't break her word!"

"Just so; but do you think it is very manly to burden your sister with your support?"

"I don't mean to do so," sullenly. "Of course I shall get work soon. But I hadn't anywhere else to go, and I didn't think Hope would grudge me food and lodging."

"Neither does she," with a strong desire to shake the lad; but you know very well her income is small—too small to support two. She tells me you wish to become a midshipman. How do you suppose that is to be managed?"

"I don't know. Thompson won't help me. I think he hates me, and I'm sure I return the compliment."

He will have to know where you are, and what you intend doing."

"I'll not go back!" Bertie almost shrieks. "I'll run away first. I'd rather die!"

"Perhaps that would be the best thing you could do," drily; "but as that seems a very remote event, we must consider the immediate future. I think I had best go down to Stordale and interview Mr. Thompson. He will doubtless be glad to see you safely bestowed."

Bertie says nothing. To tell the truth, he is genuinely afraid of this grave-faced, stern-mannered young man, who seems to regard him as a spoiled child; and, for his own sake, he exercises some self-control, a vague hope having sprung up in his heart that Hugo will further his wishes for his sister's sake.

CHAPTER V.

Hugo goes to Stordale according to promise; but he finds Mr. Thompson more difficult to deal with than he had supposed possible. He talks grandly of his duty to his dead brother's child—of his great goodness to him, and the boy's base ingratitude.

He urged that Bertie should learn the meaning of obedience and duty, and to do this he must return to Theophrastus House and his aunt's society. And it is not until Hugo volunteers to charge himself with Bertie's maintenance that he would listen to reason, even then he is very loth to give up all power over him.

But a little conversation with Mrs. Thompson convinced him that he had better close with Hugo's offer at once, allowing the young man no time to change his mind, and he busies himself on drawing up an agreement to the effect that he yields all claim to or authority over "Bertie William Floyd," appointing as his sole guardian, Hugo Glyn, of Glyn Hall, in the county of Hampshire, the said Hugo Glyn to be charged with the maintenance of Bertie William Floyd until such time as he could be reasonably supposed to earn his own livelihood.

Armed with this document, Hugo returns to London, and rejoices his ward by announcing his intention of placing him in the navy.

Hope cries a little over the idea of parting, and the dangers Bertie will encounter; but the boy has no regrets—no fears.

He is only anxious to break away from the quiet home, the gentle restraint of his sister, and talks garrulously of the great exploits he will perform, unless Hugo is present, when he subsides into silence.

At last one morning, with many tears and prayers, Hope kisses his bright face, and the beautiful, petulant mouth, and wishes him good-bye broken-heartedly; he answers her carelessly—gaily, giving her no crumb of comfort on which to brood through all the months of his absence; and he is even a trifle impatient that she should stand so patiently by "to see the last of him," and looks furtively round at his new comrades, fearing to discover some sign of amusement or contempt.

And when he is gone, quite vanished from the yearning gaze of Hope's sad eyes, Hugo leads the girl home, speaking such kindly sympathetic words as few who know him would believe him capable of.

It is well for her that at this time her life is a busy one, or perhaps her loneliness would break down her courage; as it was, Mrs. Courtney had recently come into a small fortune, which she was speedily dissipating in entertainments to her thousand and one friends; and, although it is not in their agreement, Hope is called upon to amuse the guests by her performances on violin and piano. Hugo remonstrates with her upon her submission, advises her to rebel, but she shakes her head sadly.

"I am better at work, Hugo, for then I cannot think. And if I threw up my situation my next might be worse."

"Oh, Hope, if you could only think over my old proposal!"

"We are friends," she says, gently, "let us remain so; perhaps if we were more, you would grow tired of me. Please do not speak of this again."

And he schools himself to silence.

One night Mrs. Courtney gives a ball, and Hope is expected to preside at the piano throughout the evening.

Hugo, of course is amongst those invited, but he declines in curt terms.

"It is impossible for me to accept," he says to Hope, "unless you are placed on an equality with me. How dare that woman make you pipe to their dancing?"

So to-night the girl feels sadly alone and unprotected, is conscious, for the first time, how much she depends on Hugo for solace and strength.

She hears the buzz of voices around her, the swish and swirl of gauzy garments, the light ripple of careless laughter, and her thoughts go sadly back to that proud and happy night in her own life, such a little time ago, so long ago as measured by her passionate woe. She plays on like one in a dream, until the subtle music of a tender and familiar voice speaks her name.

"Hope!"

She lifted her heavy, sweet eyes to the handsome face above, and answered, apologetically,—

"Yes, it is I. What do you want with me? Did you not know you would see me here?"

"No. Has it come to this? Oh, my poor girl!"

"What else could it come to?" drearily. "Unless, indeed, I went to the river, as hundreds of poor souls have gone before me. Oh! we women are such a happy, fortunate lot."

"Hope, if there is anything I can do for you—"

"but she interrupted him.

"There is not. I am clothed, fed, and lodged. What more can I wish?"

"Cannot I help you in any way? and Clarice will be glad to meet you in the old fashion."

She looks into the handsome, somewhat worn, face, with deepening scorn in her eyes.

"I need no help; and Clarice and I are as strangers. Please leave me, Mr. Dunbar!"

"No, no! You are alone, and—and poor. Out of my plenty let me give you some assistance."

She thinks bitterly his plenty has been won by treachery to her, that the wealth of which he speaks is not his to bestow, and coldly averts her face.

"Hope, you never bore malice. Will you cherish it against me?"

A lady in a gauzy yellow robe glided towards them.

"Rex," she says, in a resonant voice, "I am sorry to disturb such an interesting conversation as this appears to be, but you are promised to me for the next dance."

He flashes guiltily and keeps an embarrassed silence, but Hope lifts pleading eyes to the woman's fair face.

"Clarice, won't you speak to me?"

"Mrs. Dunbar, if you please," answers the

other, insolently; "and I have nothing to say to you. Come, Rex!" and she moved away, carrying her husband captive.

He dare not look towards the woman he loves, because the woman he has married watches him throughout the whole night, regards Hope with such malevolence that he trembles for her.

And yet he longs, with all the strength of his weak, unstable nature, to carry the forlorn girl some comfort, to give her some assurance of his loyal friendship.

He curses the fate which has separated him from her, and will not see that his cowardice has spoiled his life, and as it is not in his nature to treat a woman harshly, is kind and deferential to the jealous wife he neither loves nor respects.

But he is foolishly resolved to see Hope at some future time, to offer her such assistance as lies in his power, to make her life a little happier if possible, and then, surely, she will forgive him the great wrong he has done.

To-night, for the first time in her existence, Hope walks home alone, afraid of the solitude and darkness, thinking bitterly of the days when she had been attended as a queen, when men had vied with each other in their care of and solicitude for her. But she is wise enough to say nothing to Hugo of Mrs. Courtney's neglect.

"I cannot afford to offend my employer with complaints, and I suppose other girls are subject to the same kind of treatment," she muses.

The slow days wear by, and once or twice Rex has met her in the open streets, presumably by accident, and she has schooled herself to greet him with the careless courtesy of a casual acquaintance, is surprised to find that her pulses beat no faster at his approach, that the old wild love is surely dying; unconsciously she has loved him less from the hour she knew him to be false.

But she does grow hotly rebellious against fate, when one day Hugo tells her he is leaving England for India on important business, and must shortly wish her good-bye. Perhaps he is not sorry to go. The self-control he has so long exercised is beginning to fail him, and he has a vague hope that his absence may teach her that he is dearer to her than she has supposed.

"I shall be lonely without you," she said simply and a little tremulously. "You see you are my one friend. Must you really go?"

"There is no alternative. A distant cousin of mine has recently died at Singapore, and has left his orphan girl to my care. She is at present staying with some friends, but as they are moving up the country in a short while, they would like to consign her to my keeping as soon as possible."

"How old is she?" Hope asks with an odd, uneasy sensation stirring her head.

"About six or seven, I should say, and what on earth am I to do with her I can't guess. What experience have I of children? And to make matters worse, she is an heiress."

"In that respect she is an unfortunate," bitterly, "for she will never know who are her friends unless her riches take wings."

"Poor girl, your own experience has been so cruel, but you must not forget that, come what may, I am your friend now and always."

"I know, and believe me, I am not ungrateful."

The young man moves a little nearer, an anxious wistful expression in his dark eyes.

"Hope," he says gently, "I am not going to bother you with any forbidden nonsense, but I want you to answer me one question honestly and truly. Is Rex Dunbar still too dear to you?"

She lifts steady eyes to his, and her face flames into colour. "No, Hugo, and—and I am surprised at my own forgetfulness. I used to boast of my constancy."

Just a moment he is tempted to plead his own cause, but he represses the impulse, and leaves her to go on his long journey, not knowing what calamity will befall her in his absence

what shame and sorrow, what privation, she will have to endure alone.

"Good-bye," he says at parting, "good-bye, dear, I will return quickly."

"I hope so, for I shall miss you badly," and her sweet eyes were wet as she turned away, her heart ached intolerably, and so at last she learnt that she loved him and that it required this parting to teach her the truth.

And now he is gone, and the world empty without him; worse still, about this time Rex begins to dog her steps, to meet her on the homeward way, and to pour complaints of his misery into her unwilling ears. It is in vain to repulse him, to urge that he is wronging both Clarice and herself by such confidences; the man's selfish egotism baffles all her attempts. She sees with pain that he is drifting lower and lower, both morally and socially, that already the handsome face shows signs of dissipation. And before Hugo has reached his journey's end and the climax comes, Clarice learns that her husband is in the daily habit of meeting Hope, and of course lays the onus of this thing upon the girl's shoulders. In a paroxysm of rage and jealousy she drives to Mrs. Courtney's and considerably astonishes that lady by her marvellous command of invectives.

"My dear Clarice, I think you must be mistaken," she says, finding an opportunity to speak at last. "I have always found Miss Floyd discreet and quiet; and I hardly think she would stand so high in Mr. Glyn's esteem if she were the unscrupulous flirt you represent her."

"Pooh!" sneers Clarice. "Everybody knows Hugo Glyn is her lover, and that she will have nothing to say to him because she has a penchant for Rex. I am not mistaken, and you owe it to yourself and children to rid yourself of such a creature."

The matron wavers, and Clarice, seeing her advantage, presses her farther.

"I do not wish to be unjust, so I would advise that you tell her of what she stands accused and so give her a chance to defend herself—if she cannot—"

"Why, then, of course I shall discharge her," interrupts the other; "but I am very sorry."

So when the morning's lessons are ended, Hope is summoned to Mrs. Courtney's presence, and one glance into the pretty, soulless face warns her trouble is at hand.

"I have sent for you, Miss Floyd, that you may have a chance of clearing your character of a very grave aspersion. Is it true you are in the habit of meeting Mr. Dunbar daily?"

"No, Mrs. Courtney; but it is quite true he waylays me both going and coming."

"Do not quibble. It is not at all feasible that a man would persistently force himself upon a girl who gave him no encouragement."

"Nevertheless it is true, madam," the girl cries, hot and trembling.

"If you are indeed so averse to his attentions, why have you not complained of them?"

"For very shame. A woman does not like to confess herself insulted."

"I am afraid I can hardly accept such flimsy reasons as you offer for your silence. Perhaps you will assure me Mr. Dunbar has never used the language of love in addressing you—I mean since these daily meetings began?"

"I cannot," the girl cries, in an agony of shame and dread. "He has persecuted me cruelly, madam. I am innocent of offence."

"I wish I could believe you. I do not say you are guilty, but I owe it to myself to employ no lady whose character is not absolutely stainless, and so, Miss Floyd, much as I regret such a measure, I must beg you to consider yourself at liberty to seek another engagement."

"How can I hope to obtain work with my damaged reputation?" Hope says, wildly.

"Oh, Mrs. Courtney, I pray you see to Mr. Dunbar. He will tell you all the truth—he cannot do less."

"His evidence could hardly be called impartial. No, I can allow of no appeal; but, of course, I will pay you a week's wages in lieu of notice, and I would recommend you in future to be more circumspect in your conduct."

Mechanically Hope gathered up the little heap of silver. Her face was white as driven snow, her eyes wild, but she has no word to say, until Mrs. Courtney speaks again.

"Please to go now. I am sorry that I should have such an account to render Mr. Glyn on his return."

"I am innocent, indeed—indeed I am! But, madam, show me some mercy, although you believe me so base. Do not let him suspect the cause of my dismissal—the shame of it would kill me!"

"I can say nothing but the truth," coldly; and seeing all entreaties are useless the wretched girl goes silently out and down into the street.

There she meets Rex, but when he accosts her she lifts such passionate, reproachful eyes to his that for very shame he allows her to pass without further molestation.

So she comes at last to her own room, and locking herself in, gives way to such a passion of tears that at last, from sheer exhaustion, she falls asleep.

When she wakes the room is quite dark; the fire is out, and she is shivering with cold, sick with the burden of unmerited shame.

CHAPTER VI.

AND now begins a hand-to-hand struggle with want and despair, and Hope has been so unused to the former, too brave to learn the meaning of the latter until now.

Recovering some degree of composure, she summons Mrs. Burton, and tells her that in future she must be content with one room, as she has lost her situation, and must begin to practise economy at once.

Then, at last, she learns, in a measure, something of Hugo's bounty.

Mrs. Burton tells her that he has all along hired the sitting-room for her, and the rent is pre-paid, so that she will have a shelter, come what may.

At first a feeling of indignation seizes her that he should have played even such an innocent deception upon her, that she should so long have been his pensioner; but this is succeeded by a rush of gratitude to him and to Heaven that, at least, in the wide world, there is a home for her.

With renewed courage she begins her search for employment. Once or twice she nearly succeeds in obtaining a situation, but the would-be employers become suddenly frigid and contemptuous as they read Mrs. Courtney's testimony to her character.

The companion or governess must be without reproach; she lives frugally, denying herself all but the merest necessities of life, and yet her money vanishes with terrible rapidity; the little store of silver dwindles away, and unless she can get work she must starve.

One day she finds her stock reduced to a shilling. She shivers as she looks down upon the solitary coin, but no tears rise to her eyes—she is beyond the relief of tears.

With trembling hands she begins to overhaul her belongings. The inexpensive trinkets she has dared to keep back as mementoes of her happier days, the dresses in which Rex had seen and admired her—one by one these must go, there is no help for it. So she makes up a small bundle, and, stealing out shamefacedly, makes her way to a second-hand clothes shop.

Of course, she receives about one-tenth of the value, but she is too depressed to remonstrate, and, gathering up the money, goes out, thinking, "At least, I shall not go hungry to-day!"

She never thinks of appealing to her aunt for assistance; she knows too well what sort of kindness that lady is in the habit of show-

ing the unfortunate. She cannot communicate with her brother or Hugo. She is indeed alone in the world, one on whom Fortune has long ceased to smile.

How she lives she can hardly say. Day after day is spent seeking employment, and finding none. There are so few situations, and so many applicants; she is only one of a wretched multitude for whom the world has no use, no place!

Her journeys to and fro from the pawnbroker's have been very frequent, and now she has parted with her last treasure. When the proceeds of that are gone, there is nothing before her but starvation.

One evening she comes in jaded and sick at heart to find Mrs. Burton waiting her in the hall.

"If you please, Miss Floyd," she says, sharply, "can I have a few words with you?"

"Follow me to my room, please, I will hear you there," and she toils wearily upstairs, followed by the landlady, looking very grim and resolute.

Without waiting Hope's permission, she seats herself in the easiest chair, and a faint flush rises to the girl's worn cheeks, as she half-unconsciously notes this sudden insolence of manner.

"What is it, Mrs. Burton? Please be brief. I am very tired, and would like to rest."

"Miss Floyd, I'll be as quick as I can, for it isn't a pleasant subject I've got to speak upon. I heard to-day, for the first time, why you were sent away from Mrs. Courtney's, and must say that I could scarcely believe it. But when proofs were given, what could I do? I am very sorry that so pretty a young lady should be no better than she ought to be; and, in justice to myself, I must ask you to leave my house to-morrow. I am a respectable woman, and have my living to get!"

For a few moments Hope does not seem to realise the sense of Mrs. Burton's words; but as it slowly dawns upon her a hectic flush rises to her cheeks, and her eyes grow wild.

"Do you mean," she pants, "that you are cruel enough to believe this evil report about me? That you intend thrusting me out upon the world? Oh! you are a woman and a mother, show some pity to a poor orphan girl, who has done no wrong," and she catches the woman by the skirts. But Mrs. Burton shakes her off, indignant that one so degraded should presume so far.

"Wait until Mr. Glyn returns; he will tell you who and what I am."

"No, miss; Mr. Glyn is far too partial to say one word against you; but perhaps, when he hears how you flirted with Mr. Dunbar, as soon as he was gone, he won't think quite so highly of you!"

The words did not convey one tenth of the speaker's meaning, but the tone was so full of insolence, of profound scorn for this poor, forsaken creature, that Hope ceased her pleading, and stood erect with her head thrown back proudly, and a new strange dignity of mien.

"I am entitled to the use of this room until Mr. Glyn's return, but after the words you have spoken I cannot remain here. To-morrow morning I will go, but until then do not intrude upon me," and she motions the somewhat abashed woman to go.

When she is again alone she does not moan or cry, but her eyes burn with inward fever, her cheeks are flushed carnation.

She has no fire, and the night is cold, so she throws herself upon the bed, and covering herself with the clothes, tries to sleep, but cannot.

Towards dawn, however, she falls into an uneasy slumber, from which she wakes unrefreshed, and aching in every limb.

But she rises at once, and having made a hasty toilet, breakfasts on a piece of bread, and packing her few belongings into a small bag, goes downstairs and out of the house, never to enter it again.

It is still very early, and after a little hesi-

tation she stops at a coffee stall, and demands a cup of the steaming drink.

Then feeling a little refreshed she goes on her way, seeking the employment she is so hopeless of finding.

Hour after hour passes, and still she plods on hungry, faint, and footsore; afraid to spend even a penny for bread lest she should be one day nearer starvation; she has eaten once to-day, and that must suffice.

All unwittingly she wanders into Oxford-street, and there she suddenly hears her own name spoken, and lifting weary eyes, sees Rex Dunbar before her.

His face wears a shocked expression, as he notes her pallor, the shabbiness of her dress, and her general air of privation.

"I didn't mean to harm you," he said in a husky, hurried voice. "I didn't know what had happened to you until yesterday, when Mrs. Courtney told me you were dismissed, and why. I was furious, and had an awful scene with Clarice; then this very morning I went to your lodgings, and that old harriidan shut the door in my face, not even telling me you were gone. I thought she was acting on your instructions; but, Hope, you would not be so cruel! You are tired, poor girl, let me take you home?"

And then she laughed, with such terrible bitterness that people turned to stare at her, and Rex looked hastily and fearfully round.

"Home!" she said. "Home! I have none; you have driven me from my only shelter!"

"Hope! You cannot mean this? My poor girl! My dear love! What a brute I have been! If only I could undo the past! But you know. Oh! yes, you must know that, having found you, I will never lose sight of you again! That so long as I live you shall never want—that I love you heart and soul."

Again she laughed, and he saw her eyes were wild, that she trembled as with cold. He took her hand and drew it in his arm.

"Come with me to some quiet place, where we can talk uninterruptedly. Hope, dear, I have been a beast, and insulted you awfully at times, but I'm not quite such a cad as you believe. I will take you to some nice, quiet lodging, where you may rest until you find work, and I promise never to molest you, or attempt to see you against your wish—let me be your banker until you need one no longer. And when Glyn comes home, you will marry him and be happy; if I had not been a coward and a knave, I might have stood in his shoes; but I don't suppose you care a fig for me now."

Hope does not answer, she is thinking how to escape from him—this man she has loved and now despises, this man who has wrought out such misery for her. And it seems for once her lucky star is in the ascendant.

There is a sudden outcry—a sudden rush of many feet towards them. A wretched-looking man is being pursued by a motley mob, which carries all before it, and even as she hears the shout "Stop thief!" and Rex saying savagely "Stand back! would you hurt a lady?" she slips her hand from his arm and darts unperceived down a narrow street.

In the press and excitement Rex did not notice at first that she was gone, but when the crowd had passed, the thief captured, he looked round for his companion, and realized that she had fled.

It is in vain he searches every lane and court in the vicinity. She is lost to him, so utterly, so entirely that further search is folly and in an agony of anxiety and remorse he goes to his own luxurious home, maddened by the thought that the woman he so loves is homeless, friendless, and it may be penniless—she looked weak, as though with long fasting.

Meanwhile Hope pursues her way with weak uncertain steps, and avoiding all the principal streets, walks on and on, until she can go no farther. So she sits down to rest in a long since disused cemetery, now converted

into gardens, and being very weary, falls asleep.

When she wakes it is growing dusk, and a cold, small rain is falling. Wearily she lifts herself, her limbs ache and are so heavy she scarce can drag herself along, only she must find some quiet place in which to spend the night.

"Oh! it was pitiful,
Near a whole cityful,
Home she had none!"

She would accost a policeman and ask him to direct her to a cheap respectable lodging, and then having rested a whole night she would be strong to begin another day's weary work.

But her mind begins to wander; old scenes, old friends, old dreams rise before her, and soon the present is forgotten; she is living in the dear, dead past, revelling in old pleasures, old friendships.

She feels no more the biting wind or blinding rain; she is walking as one in a dream, and has no thought, no care for the morrow. Hundreds pass her by unheeding, hurrying homewards—she does not realise there is no such blessed refuge for her. One or two policemen look curiously at the white, small face, and star-bright eyes; but she has forgotten the question she meant to ask, and pursues her way with faltering steps until she comes to the river. She pauses a moment on Westminster Bridge.

"I am so tired," she says aloud, "I could rest here; but Hugo will be waiting for me, and I must go home. How the lights dazzle me, how the river runs on! Will it never rest? There is nothing good in the world but sleep, and I shall sleep soon."

She drags herself on a little farther yet; then her brain reels, her heart beats wildly a moment, then seems to cease, and with a low, inarticulate cry, she sinks down unconscious, a huddled heap upon the pavement. A crowd quickly gathers, and one heartless wretch taken advantage of the general excitement to steal her hand bag and hurry away with it. Then a policeman saunters up. "Move on! move on!" he says with authority, and a woman in the crowd retorts,—

"Shan't! Move on yourself; you're not wanted! 'Spose you'll say this poor girl ain't ill, but drunk? That's the way with you bobbies!"

A burst of laughter greets her sally, which the officer wisely ignores, and forcing his way through the increasing crowd he turns his lantern full upon the white face, and helpless, inert figure. Then he says gently (for he has daughters of his own).—

"Make way there, the poor lass is ill, and had best be taken to the hospital."

So Hope is carried to "St. Thomas's," and there laid in a snowy bed; doctors and nurses hover about her, with intent and anxious faces, other patients regard her curiously, pitifully, but she is unconscious of it all, fighting weakly for life. And whilst she lies there, helpless and delirious, Hugo returns to England with his little charge, Ivy Wyndham, and learns at last all the wrong and shame his darling has endured, but cannot discover her hiding-place, though he spends a small fortune in advertising and detectives.

CHAPTER VII.

For weeks Hope's life is despaired of, but she is young and strong, and at length is declared out of danger, although so frail and helpless that it is long before she can leave her bed. The doctors shake their heads over her still, and declare that she must have some trouble, some heavy secret, upon her mind to retard her recovery, and the nurses (at least the younger ones) weave impossible romances about this sweet, pale-faced girl, whom nobody cares to visit.

She looks forward with horror to the time of her discharge, when the old, old struggle must be renewed, the old fight for existence,

when she will esteem herself fortunate if she can earn a roof to cover her and a crust of bread to eat. At last one morning she dresses with trembling hands, and prepares to leave the ward which has been such a haven of rest to her; then a nurse joins her.

"Come to my room," she says, gently, "I have something to say to you."

Half unwillingly she follows Sister Rose, into a large, airy apartment, and having sipped the wine offered her waits for the other to speak.

"Two or three of us are anxious about your future; will you think me impertinent if I ask what you intend doing, when you have left us?"

"I am going to my friends!" Hope answers with a deep blush, and a bitter pang at the thought of her desolate condition.

"We concluded you had no friends or relatives," Sister Rose says, with a keen glance at her, "as you received no visitors, and evidently expected none."

"I have an aunt of good position; but she does not know of my illness."

"And you will go to her?"

Hope bows, unable to lie to this grave, sweet-faced woman, who is so genuinely interested in her. Then she says quickly,—

"Pray have no fear or anxiety concerning me! I shall do nothing rash. I am not so much alone in the world as you believe."

"But I know you are penniless, and you must have money to assist you to your friends; so a few of us have made a subscription for you. It is not much but it is better than nothing," and suddenly Hope, catches her hand, and kisses it wildly, whilst the tears rain down her cheeks.

"You are too good to me!" she cries agitatedly, "too good; and though, Heaven helping me, I will one day repay you the money, I never can repay the charity you have shown me."

"Hush, Hope, you will hurt yourself by this excitement, and you must not over-rate what we have done, only if it is ever in your power to help one less fortunate than yourself, remember to day and do not hold your hand. One thing more, and then you are free to go, will you promise to write me in the course of a week? It is not much to ask, and it will allay my anxiety about you."

"I promise," Hope says simply, and there being nothing more left to say but "good-bye," she soon finds herself outside the hospital, confused and dazed by the noise and bustle around. She is still very weak, and her knees tremble under her, so she walks towards Westminster Abbey, thinking that she will rest there, and map out her future. After the grinding poverty she had endured, the sovereign clasped so tightly in her hand seems great wealth, and again and again as she sits in the "dim religious light," she utters thanksgivings for the precious gift. Then suddenly a great yearning came upon her to see her own dear home, and she rises, trembling and faint with her longing. "I will look on it once more," she thinks "and, please Heaven, I will die."

So she gets into a 'bus and is driven towards the nearest station, where she ascertains a train is shortly to start for Glyndale, and having taken a ticket waits with what patience she can for the time of departure.

The season is so far advanced now that myriads of flowers dance before her eyes as they spin through the open country. "It will be at its loveliest now," she says to herself, "and I shall die content, having once looked upon it."

She is so weak and so hopeless that she does not wish to live, scarcely believes it possible she should, and at one station at which they stop, she purchases some paper and pencil, upon which she writes a few words addressed to Bertie.

"DEAR BOY,—

"I am going to look my last at our dear old home, and I have a conviction that having

seen it I shall die; it is better so, for I cannot earn my bread, and my friends have all forgotten me (save Mr. Glyn who is too far away to help me). You will get this letter after some delay, and then as you love me, let Sister Rose of St. Thomas's hear how and where I died. My dearest love to you, and do not fret about my end.

"HOPE FLOYD."

Placing the letter in her pocket she leaned back, and gives herself up wholly to the dreary languor stealing over her, and in her heart she believes it to be the faintness of death, and is glad, "and yet," she says, "if I could see Hugo I would be content to bear life; if I could see him and remain unseen myself, for I could not bear to find him changed as they have doubtless changed him."

It was still quite early in the evening when she reached Glyndale, and passing out of the little station unrecognised by any, walks slowly and wearily along the high road. Towards the left she sees the stately towers and gleaming windows of Glyn Hall, where but for her ill-starred and misplaced love, she might now be reigning, beloved by Hugo, envied and courted by all. The contrast between what might have been and what is, strikes her cruelly, and a little sob rises to her lips, but she keeps it valiantly back. Then a turn in the road brings her within sight of her own home—the great red and white building which had cost Algernon Floyd a fortune; she sees the winding paths beneath the familiar trees, the gleaming statues and glistening fountains. This had been her Paradise. Here she had known all the joys of her young life—now she is an alien and an outcast, a friendless, homeless wail who has no wish but to die.

Her breath comes gaspingly, but she struggles on until she reaches the great iron gates, then strength and consciousness alike fail her, and she sinks to the ground, with one hand still clasping the rails, and lies there like one dead.

A brougham containing a gentleman and little girl is coming slowly along the road; but neither the gentleman nor his coachman notice the alight, prostrate figure beside the gate. The child, however, jumps up in a state of great excitement and pity.

"Oh, uncle! Uncle Hugo, please stop the carriage! a poor lady is lying there ill! Let me get out!"

"Stop! stop, Ivy! You shall come presently!" he answers, authoritatively. "What was I about not to see her before!" and, springing down, he goes hurriedly towards the hapless wayfarer. "Her clothes look like a lady's, though they are shabby," he thinks. Then, bending over her, he lifts the heavy, dark head, and sees the face of his own dear love.

A sharp cry of passion and pain breaks from him.

"My love! my love! that it should come to this!" then he has lifted the slight form in his strong arms, and is hurrying to the brougham.

"Ob, Uncle! Is she dead!"

"Hush!" he says, hoarsely. "Hush, child!" Then, to the coachman, "Make all haste to the Hall. This lady is Miss Floyd!" And, holding her close, as though he fears once more to lose her, they are driven to the home where once he hoped she would reign his queen—his wife.

Hope is very long before she recovers consciousness, and then is considerably surprised to find herself installed in a large and handsomely-furnished room, which, somehow, seems strangely familiar to her. And as she stirs upon the bed, a woman comes forward, a woman all smiles and tears.

"Miss Hope, dear! you've come back at last! Indeed, you should never have left us, there's none could love you better!"

"Why, you are Mrs. Thaxter! Then, where am I?" the girl asks, dreamily.

"At the Hall, miss. Mr. Hugo himself found and brought you here. And when you're well enough, he would like to see you. He is waiting very impatiently downstairs."

"I will see him now, please."

So Hugo comes in, and Mrs. Thaxter presently retreats.

The young man can find no word to say, being shaken by emotion; but the girl puts out one small, thin hand, and speaks in a faint voice.

"I have been very ill, and thought that I should die; and I wanted to see my old home just once! Mrs. Thaxter tells me you brought me here. Thank you, dear friend! And I will try to trouble you as little as I can. I'll go away presently, when you have promised not to believe the cruel things they have said of me."

"You shall never go away, unless you wish it!" he says, brokenly. "Hope, I want you! Hope, I love you more than ever I did!"

"But," she said, whilst a flush of joy crosses her face, "they have tried to take away my good name; and your wife must be beyond reproach!"

"As she is! Sweetheart, love me a little, if only because I love you! Will you try to learn the lesson?"

"It is already learned!" she whispers. And then—well, then?

Hope lives to be a happy wife, to see the discomfiture of her enemies, the prosperity of her brother; lives to see the gradual degradation of the man she once believed she loved, to offer once more the hand of friendship to the woman who so sorely betrayed her; to comfort her in all her trials; to induce her for good. Lives to see her own fair children growing up about her into beauty and strength, to know that with each year of her life her husband's love and reverence increase, that the world holds no such treasure for him as this woman, who is far above rubies.

[THE END.]

FACETIÆ.

A RANK decoder—A visiting foreigner's sham title.

QUEER, but the sleepy student often becomes a nap scholar.

A BLAT on a piece of fair manuscript is a decided ink ambrance.

If a young lady's maiden aim is successful, she has no maiden name.

It is probably the attention paid it which makes the weather-vane.

WHEN a singer's throat is raw you can't expect her songs to be well done.

WHEN a cat gives an entertainment from the top of a wall it isn't the cat we object to, it's the waul.

It is said that no one can arrest the flight of time, but who is there who is not able to stop a minute?

AN "anti-chap toilet cream" is advertised. It will never become popular. The girls are too fond of the chaps.

PASSENGER: "Do we stop long enough at the next station to eat a sandwich?" GUARD: "No, sir; we only stop twenty minutes."

A MAN died in Scotland who smoked over two thousand herrings a day. Worse than the tobacco habit. No wonder he died.

SPIRITON was once asked whether a member of a brass band could be a true Christian. His answer was: "Yes, I think he might, but not his next-door neighbour."

"Have you been studying this summer?" asked one lady member of an opera company of another. "A little; I have devoted a great deal of time to practice." "Indeed! how high can you sing?" "Well, I have reached as high as twenty pounds a night."

MR. FERVOUR: "Now give me a sweet kiss, darling!" MISS CANDOUR: "Were not my other kisses sweet?"

TINED customer (in restaurant): "Wait'r, a (his) rum omelet!" WAITER: "Yes, sir. With or without eggs?"

"Is Mr. Bramley tall?" "Personally he is." "Personally?" "Yes. Officially he is short. Three thousand pounds short. That is why he went to Mexico."

MISS BEGONIA: "I love music! do you play on any instrument, Mr. Smith?" SMITH (who noted as college-waiter last summer, absent-mindedly): "Only the gong."

A WELSH village boasts of a woman who "goes out and chops wood with her husband." It is customary to use an axe, but he may be an unusually sharp man.

ETHEL (shuddering): "How the trees moan and sigh to-night!" BOBBY (speaking whereof he knows): "Well, you'd moan and sigh if you were as full of green apples as they be."

SHE (at the races): "What's the trouble at the judge's stand, George?" HE: "There is some dispute over the last heat." SHE: "Aren't their thermometers all alike, George?"

GRANDMA'S IDEA:—"Brother Tom says bicycle riding is splendid exercise for the calves. Grandma says it may be, but she can't for the life of her see how you would get them to stay on."

DUDEKIN (who had just put on a new suit of clothes in the shop): "Wait a minute. I go over to the bank and get a cheque cashed." TAILOR going out with him: "Very well; I'll follow suit."

STUDENT (not very clear as to his lesson): "That's what the author says, anyway." PROFESSOR: "I don't want the author; I want you." STUDENT (despairingly): "Well, you've got me."

"I see a buttonless shirt advertised here, John," said a wife, looking up from a paper. "What kind of shirt is that?" "Just like mine," was the reply, and the wife resumed her reading.

To one of the well-advanced classes the question was asked, "What is the highest form of animal life?" "The giraffe," was the immediate response from a bright member of the class.

LITTLE PASSENGER (on incoming ocean steamship): "Mrs. McGennis, what do folks mean by saying there is a wake behind the vessel?" MRS. MCGENNIS: "Sure, now, isn't it a wake since we started?"

AN old-fashioned fellow being chided by his wife for eating with his knife, excused himself by saying, "Silver forks are all right enough for those with whom they agree, but my system requires steel."

"WHAT did the horses stop for, George?" "They made a false start, and have to go back to the post again." "Oh, George! and the horses we are betting on was ever so far ahead! I don't think that's fair!"

TOMMY went fishing without permission of his mother. Next morning a neighbour's son met him and asked, "Did you catch anything yesterday, Tommy?" "Not till I got home," was the rather sad response.

DISCHARGED FOR CURED:—"Why did you leave your last place?" "Sure I worr discharged for doin' well, mum." "Discharged for doing well? Why, where were you?" "I worr in the hospital, mum."

HE was travelling in Greece. "What town is this?" he asked, as the train stopped for a moment. "This," said his guide, referring to his memorandum-book, "is the town where Homer was not born."

"I WAS at the wedding at the church last evening, Miss Lighthouse. Allow me to congratulate you on your elegant appearance as a bridesmaid. You were robed in ecstasy divine, I suppose?" "That's about as much as you men know, Mr. Tuclid. I wore a robe of white silk and point lace."

FOND HUSBAND: "My dear, why did you accept me the first time I proposed, instead of being coy and reluctant?" WIFE: "Because, pet, I had reached that age when I could not afford to run any risk of getting left."

ANSWERED:—"Did you ask Miss Pointer to dance last night?" "Yes, and she said she was engaged." "And what did she say the second time?" "That she was tired." "And the third time?" "That she was going home."

A WELSHMAN thus showed the depth of his love for home: "Paris is a grand place. Its Faly Rooley, its Rue de Rivolye, its Toc-leers, and its Change Elizas are fine, sir, very fine, sir; but for real grandeur, give me Wales."

BUSINESS V. PLEASURE.—Mother: "Goodness me! Is that Irene at the piano?" Little son: "Yes, ma." "Well, go ask her what she is doing. If she is practising, she can keep on until the hour is up; but if she is playing, tell her to stop."

ELDERLY MAIDEN (to chemist's boy): "Well I do declare, if I ain't forgot what I came for!" Boy (full of business): "Hair dye? rouge lotion to remove freckles? wrinkle eradiator? bottle bloom of youth?" Elderly maiden hails a passing bus.

"WHAT are you going to buy your wife for a birthday present?" asked Colonel Jones of Equire Johnson. "I'm thinking of getting her a piano." "Can she play?" "No, of course not. Do you think I'd be such a fool as to buy her a piano if she could play?"

"Is everything gone?" she asked. "Everything but my honour," he replied. "Well, it's lucky you took all the diamonds out of your stock and transferred them to me last week, wasn't it? I'm awfully glad, though, that you didn't do anything dishonest."

JOHNNY witnessed a military drill on the Common, recently. One of the officers rode a horse which was very unruly, and in some of his antics threw his rider, whereupon Johnny exclaimed excitedly: "Mamma, mamma, Captain Fissell's horse doesn't fit him!"

A LONG TERM.—Irish Guide (to American tourist): "And there is no king nor queen in America, they're tellin' me, sur?" Indifferent Tourist: "No; we've a President there." "And how long have you bin havin' a President moight I ax, sur?" A.T.: "O something over a hundred years!" I. G. (stopping, paralyzed with astonishment): "Howly saint! And do they live that long beyant there?"

BULLS.—A bull may be said to be a gross contradiction, or blunder in speech. It was derived from one Obadiah Bull, a lawyer in the time of Henry VIII., who was celebrated rather than famous, for the blunders which fell from his lips when he pleaded before the judges. A witty Irishman, upon being asked for the definition of a bull, said, "If you see two cows lying down alone in a field, the one standing up is sure to be a bull." Mrs. Edgeworth, in her essays on "Irish Bulls," gives the following:—"When I first saw you, I thought it was you, and now I see it is your brother." "I met you this morning and you did not come; I'll meet you to-morrow morning, whether you come or not." "Oh, if I had stayed in that climate until now I should have been dead two years." During the Irish rebellion, an Irish paper published this item:—"A man named McCarthy was run over by a passenger train and killed on Wednesday. He was injured in a similar way two years ago." In 1784 the Irish house of commons issued an order to this effect:—"Any member unable to write may get another member to frank his letter for him, but only on condition that he certifies with his own handwriting his inability on the back of it." A well-known English epitaph commences as follows:—"Reader, if thou can't read." This is somewhat akin to the hand-board which read "The ford is dangerous when this board is covered by the water."

SOCIETY.

THE Empress Frederick and her daughters, who have been on a visit to the Queen at Osborne, went to town for a week. Her Majesty was then to go to Sandringham on a visit to the Prince and Princess of Wales.

WHILE at Aske Hall the Prince of Wales will open the new Town Hall and Municipal Buildings at Middlesbrough; in fact, that is the principal object His Royal Highness has in visiting Lord and Lady Zetland.

PRINCE GEORGE OF WALES is going to Malta for the ball to be given by his uncle, the Duke of Edinburgh, and it is probable that Master George will stay there until the spring when he will join the *Northumberland*.

AN eye-witness, says *Modern Society*, declares that on Christmas Eve the poor little sons of the Emperor of Germany spent half their day gazing ruefully out of the Palace windows at the lively scene in the Friedrichstrasse below, where almost all the other small boys and girls in the capital were abroad, buying Christmas presents, eating sweets, and looking at the gay stalls and shop-windows.

Alas! peasant boys and gamins were free to disport themselves there to their hearts' content; but Princes of the House of Hohenzollern must remain discreetly within doors, and long for a share of the good things so tantalising to behold! We will hope they were comforted by hopes of what Mamma was going to bring in presently; for the Kaiserin drove out in the early morning, quite unattended, to buy her Christmas gifts incognito, and perhaps thereby get them a little cheaper! And she actually alighted from her carriage and ransacked the shops, inspected the stalls in the street fair, and condescended to chaffer with the saleswomen, in the true fashion of the orthodox German Frau, who loves to husband her pennance, and make the most of her thalers!

We are sorry to learn that the health of the ex-Empress Eugénie is once more very precarious indeed, such as to cause considerable anxiety. We have seen, says the contemporary quoted above, a private letter from the Duchesse de Mouchy, in which she speaks of the state of health of the widow of Césaire as being very bad. She was always highly sensitive and nervous; and moreover has of late years been a great sufferer from asthma, which malady generally tends to an enlargement of the heart. Her sister, the Duchesse d'Albe, who was as dark as Eugénie was fair, died of a pulmonary affection, and it may be that the Ex-French Empress will in future be ordered to live out of England during the winter months.

ALL being well, the Queen Regent of Spain will hold the reins of Government till her kingly son is sixteen years of age. This may count as a sixteen years' reign for herself, and one of the longest spells of power ever enjoyed by a Sovereign's deputy. At present, Alfonso XIII. opens his Parliament in dumb fashion. He has never yet addressed the Cortes in wild and incoherent terms, or burst into a wall at the presence of so many strange faces, for his wise mother has accustomed him to the sight of crowds. His first real speech as a Monarch will doubtless prove a grave event, unless His Majesty fritters away the effect by unseasonable remarks beforehand.

THE Queen of Sweden is so much better that she was able to receive the members of the Royal Family in her own apartments, this year, for the customary Christmas Trees. On the 25th all the Swedish Royal Family dined at the Palace, except the Bernadotte couple, who kept the festival quietly at Carlscrona, Princess Bernadotte being in too delicate health to come to Court just at present. They were very contented, however, in their retired home, where they are, both of them, much beloved by the inhabitants.

STATISTICS.

GERMANY last year imported 62,000 horses. It costs 1,200,000 dollars per annum to keep the streets of Paris clean.

THE last census of India indicates a population of 66,982,000. There are 6,000,000 more males than females.

THE statistics show in the past ten years there were killed in France by hunting accidents nearly 13,000 men.

The following figures give some idea of the number of animals killed every year in Siberia for the sake of their furs. At the last summer fair of Irbit, which is a market for only a part of the furs exported from Siberia, no less than 3,180,000 furs of squirrels were offered for sale. Of other furs there were 11,000 blue fox, 140,000 marmots, 30,000 polecats, 10,000 badgers, 1,300,000 hares, 2,000 foxes, and numbers of bears and wolves. The extermination of fur-bearing animals goes on with such rapidity that there are whole regions where hunting has been completely abandoned.

GEMS.

AFFLICTION is a school of virtue; it corrects levity and interrupts the confidence of sinning.

HE who receives a good turn should never forget it; he who does one should never remember it.

ADVERSITY is the trial of principle. Without it a man hardly knows whether he is honest or not.

No one pursuit, however valuable in itself, should completely engross the manhood or womanhood of any individual. Where it so exhausts the strength or the powers as to leave but a poor, ineffective remnant for other things, it is time to pause and to abstain.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

SOME USEFUL HINTS.

FOR the disagreeable sensation known as heartburn, which so often accompanies indigestion, a salt-spoonful of common salt, dissolved in half a wine glass of water, and drank, is as effective a remedy as a dose of saleratus water, and a much safer and pleasanter one.

RUBBING a bruise in sweet oil, and then in spirits of turpentine, will usually prevent the unsightly black and blue spots which not only tell tales, but deform.

WHEN there is an unpleasant odour about the feet, a small quantity of a weak solution of salicylic acid in the footbath is a sure destroyer of the offence.

IRON articles will seldom rust if they have been cleansed from oil by hot soda-water, and afterwards dipped in hot lime-water and dried.

COLLODION, spirits of turpentine, and the common salve called oxide of zinc, are each an invaluable remedy to apply to burns and scalds before a physician can arrive to do better, if better is to be done, and sweet oil and lime-water beaten up together make up a cooling and healing ointment for them as good as any medicament known.

ONE of the most treacherous medicines in all the pharmacopoeia is the hydrate of chloral which is so commonly used; cases are reported where two hundred grains have been taken in safety, and other cases where ten grains have proved fatal or afforded only a narrow escape from death by timely aid and effort; this drug should never be taken but with the advice and attendance of a physician.

MISCELLANEOUS.

IN many towns of Germany the chief barber never shaves people. He pulls teeth and does surgical trade.

A NEW English game, called "naval blockade," has recently been invented, which is said to be as intricate and fascinating as chess.

BULL-FIGHTING is increasing in popular favour in Spain. More new rings have been built during the last twelve years than during the previous twenty.

THERE is nothing so delightful as the hearing or the speaking of the truth. For this reason there is no conversation so agreeable as that of the man of integrity, who hears without any intention to betray, and speaks without any intention to deceive.

ILL NATURED PLEASANTRY.—The talent of turning men into ridicule, and exposing to laughter those one converses with, is the gratification of little minds and ungenerous tempers. Young people with this cast of mind cut themselves off from all manner of improvement.

NOTHING can be done right and efficiently without order and system, from the boiling of an egg to the management of the heaviest business or enterprise. There is a routine even in our daily personal habits. He is considered a safe man whom you always know where to find.

THE first writer to suggest that mankind was descended from two apes was James Burnet (Lord Monboddo), of Scotland, who did so in his work, "The Origin and Progress of Languages," published in Edinburgh in 1774. This was thirty-five years before Darwin was born.

IT is not the flesh, nor the eye, nor the life which are forbidden, but it is the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life. It is not this earth, nor the men who inhabit it, nor the sphere of our legitimate activity that we love, but the way in which the love is given, which constitutes worldliness.

AN ARCTIC BELLE'S ATTIRE.—A red silk handkerchief was tied around her forehead, and ribbons fluttered from the knot of hair which stood up on the crown of her head. Her boots were as red as her handkerchief, and quite as spotless. Her trousers were of the choicest and most shining seal-skin, neatly ornamented with needlework and beads. Her jacket was also of seal-skin, met with trousers at the hips, where it was fringed with a broad band of erider down.

SAVED BY A MONKEY.—An instance of the instinct and fidelity of a young monkey comes from Batignolles, a suburb of Paris. A little boy was playing in one of the rooms of his father's flat with his monkey, a most intelligent and domesticated member of its species. The boy, in a fit of juvenile caprice, tied the cord of a window blind round his neck and pretended to hang himself, to the immense amusement of his Simian playmate, which grinned and chattered on a chair. Suddenly the boy became livid and began to cry, for the cord had got into a real noose round his neck. In a very short space of time the monkey took in the situation and tried to undo the noose with its paws, but had to give up the attempt. It then hopped off to another room, where the boy's grandmother was sitting, and began to pull at her gown, to chatter, grimace, and look wistfully toward the door, she rose from her seat and went, piloted by the monkey, to the room where her grandson was moaning. The boy was instantly extricated from his perilous position, though it was some time before he recovered his pain and fright. Jocko received a nice little tablet of chocolate cream for his splendid action, and he deserved it.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

ANKOUR.—We regret we are unable to inform you.

U. M. C.—You cannot marry the young lady under the circumstances.

H. C. R.—1. Unable to aid you. 2. The chances are as good here as anywhere.

L. K.—The term "ipse dixit," for a positive assertion, first occurs in Cicero, "On the Nature of the Gods."

J. P.—You will find the subject exhaustively treated in John Stuart Mill's "Logic," Book I. ch. v.

L. M.—Longfellow's "Three Friends of Mine" were Cornelius Felton, Louis Agassiz, and Charles Sumner.

F. W.—1. The longest verse in the Bible is Esther viii. 9. 2. The word wife is first mentioned in Genesis ii. 24.

W. W. L.—Geoffrey Crayon, Esq., was a pseudonym under which Washington Irving published the "Sketch Book."

STUDENT.—1. Leave off studying for a month and take plenty of exercise, living regularly and eating well. 2. No. 3. No.

IGNORAMUS.—There is no remedy for what you rather graphically describe as corpulence of the face. In the words of Longfellow you must suffer and be strong.

TOX II.—Horace, the Latin poet, used the expression, "Aurea medicoritas," which, translated, is "golden mean," and he is supposed to have coined the expression.

C. E. S.—The European walnut, called also English walnut, grows in Asia and nearly all over Europe. Walnut wine is made from the sap of the tree, which is quite sweet.

DARK ANY.—Try a mixture of cantharides and sweet oil. Any chemist will give you the right proportions if you explain your case. It should be well rubbed into the roots of the hair.

E. A. R.—A lotion for mange in horses, cattle, and dogs is made as follows: "Corrosive sublimate, a quarter of an ounce; spirits of salts (muriatic acid), half an ounce; water, one quart.

DORA.—It will be very difficult for you to overcome your trouble, as it is due to natural embarrassment and too much self-consciousness. Try to think less of yourself, and to find a special interest in the topic of conversation.

LARRY S.—The best way out of your dilemma is frankly and delicately to state your wishes to the minister, who could not take offence if your manner and words are polite and friendly; and he will doubtless give you such a certificate as you desire.

LETTICE (Dundee).—The sketches are so hastily, and we may almost say carelessly, done that we cannot judge either of your artistic power or of the claims your sisters have to good looks. The writing is fair in style but not neat, the expression good.

AMY J.—The term Great Britain was little used until the accession of James I. to the crown of England. In 1603 united the whole of the island under one sovereign. By the legislative union between England and Scotland in 1707 Great Britain became the legal name of the kingdom.

IGNORAMUS.—1. For "Paul's Defence Before the People" and "Paul's Speech Before Agrippa" see Acts, chapters 22 and 26. You should read the Acts carefully through. 2. For the quotation, "But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison," see James iii. 8.

ELLIE.—A star stone is a variety of sapphire which, when properly cut by the lapidary, presents the appearance of a star with six rays, from which, when held in the sunshine, a very bright, yellowish-white light streams forth, in fine contrast to the rich purplish-blue of the other parts of the stone.

JESSIE C.—We are afraid from your description that your pet is in great danger. If not too late, mix equal quantities of rhubarb, powdered chalk, and ground ginger in equal parts and mix with the food in small quantities. The food you give is too heating; use less hemp and bread and no meat at all.

L. W. N.—The bayonet is named from Bayonne, in France, where bayonets are said to have been first made about 1640. Common bayonets are made straight and three-cornered, but others are like a sword, and some are shaped like a trowel, and can be used both to fight with and to dig the ground up to make banks of earth called entrenchments.

DUFFER.—1. Your parents are quite right. He is too young at present to know his own mind, and it would not be at all pleasant for you after marriage to awake to the fact that he had found out that he had been mistaken and had grown tired of you. The lot of an unloved wife is a very miserable one. Wait at least two or three years. 2. Very good indeed.

T. T.—The adoption by Charles Lamb of the signature of "Elia" is said to have been purely accidental. His first contribution to the "London Magazine" was a description of the old Southsea House, where Lamb had passed a few months' novitiate as a clerk, thirty years before, and of its inmates, who had long passed away; and remembering the name of a light-hearted foreigner who figured there at that time, he subscribed his name to the essay. It was also affixed to later contributions; and Lamb used it until, in his "Last Letters of Elia," he bade it farewell.

A. GROVER.—The site of the Garden of Eden has never been satisfactorily fixed, though incalculable study has been given to the matter. The position of the river with four heads, mentioned in Genesis ii. 10-14, has been a difficulty never disposed of. It is thought by some that the Garden of Eden was in Palestine. Others, however, think Persia has the best claim.

FLORENCE MACDONALD.—The letter is nicely written and correctly worded, but we are not skilled in the so-called science of graphology. With regard to the situation, it is impossible to advise without knowing what business you are acquainted with and your qualifications about which you say not a word. Your three year's character would be a good reference.

W. W. F.—It is possible that you could get a situation as a teacher in some part of the West of England. You would have to go there, and take your chance of succeeding. If your education is actually defective in English branches you would be apt to fail, as the standard of educational accomplishments for teachers has been raised a good deal during the last dozen years.

H. N. S.—A full set of types of one kind, enough for printing, is called fount or font. A font of type does not have the same number of each letter of the alphabet, for many more of some letters are used than of others. If it has one of the letter z, it will have sixty of a, forty-five of t, and forty each of a, i, n, o, and s. The letter e is used oftener in printing than any other letter.

F. J.—We should counsel you to remain where you are. The account you give of your acquirements though sufficiently flattering to yourself does not impress us that you are at all acquainted with the most elementary knowledge necessary for good service such as you describe. Like every other business it requires a proper training. You must not expect in any calling to get to the top of the tree at once.

NOVELLETTE.—1. The widow is only tenant for life, and, therefore, cannot dispose of the property by will. 2. The testator's interest in the property would descend to his heir-at-law unless otherwise provided in his will; the widow could, of course, dispose of her own share by will. 3. We do not understand from your description whether they are joint tenants or tenants in common. There is a great legal distinction between the two.

LEFT BEHIND.

Poor pretty bright robin, left here in the cold!
How can we guess at your story would?
Why, when the fog-bells are all flown away,
Why is it, robin, why did you stay?

Poor pretty red robin, 'mid frost and 'mid snow—
With sweet note of song and with bright breast aglow,
You have sung when the flowers have faded and gone,
When dark clouds have gathered and bright birds have flown.

Is this your life's mission, oh robin red-breast,
To bring to a weary heart comfort and rest?
Then, even through thy life shall the sacrifice be,
The work of God's angels is well done by thee.

E. T.

E. W. M.—Cast iron is not pure iron, but has carbon in it, and cannot be hammered, as it is brittle, and will easily break. To make it into wrought iron, the cast iron is melted in another kind of furnace, and stirred up so that the air can get to it. This is called puddling it, which burns out the carbon, sulphur, phosphorus, and other impure things in the iron. Steel is iron which has more carbon in it than wrought iron and less than cast iron. Its hardness is between that of wrought iron and cast iron.

ALONE IN LONDON.—Yes. You are a very sensible girl; and the course you have taken with the inventive lover who is pressing you to marry him is eminently proper and judicious. You are perfectly justified in telling him to wait until some of his marvellous inventions put him in funds before rushing into expenses and responsibilities of matrimony. Do not allow him to persuade you from the course you have marked out by that "intolerable gift of the gab" which you say he possesses to such an afflicting degree.

G. W. F.—The Three Kings of Cologne was a name given to the three magi whose bodies are said to have been brought by the Empress Helena from the East to Constantinople, whence they were transferred to Milan. Afterwards, in 1164, on Milan being taken by the Emperor Frederick, they were presented by him to the Archbishop of Cologne, who placed them in the principal church of that city, where, says Gressy, "they are to this day celebrated with great veneration." Their names are commonly said to be Jasper, Melchior, and Balthazar; but one tradition gives them as Apellius, Amerus, Damascus; another as Magalluti, Galgaluth, Sarasin; and still another as Ator, Sator, Peratoras.

PUZZLED DICK.—It is quite an easy matter to note the fractional parts of a second, if one only has the requisite means of doing so, namely, a watch with what is called an independent second-hand. This "independent second-hand" is large, and makes four distinct and easily-noted movements in a second, thus dividing the second into quarters. It is started by pressing a spring made for that purpose, and is instantaneously stopped by pressing the same spring. When stopped, it of course shows the quarter-second, the half second, or the three-quarter second, as the case may be, without the slightest difficulty, and with unerring accuracy. A second is a much greater portion of time than is popularly imagined. A man can count six in a second, and he can count four easily in that time.

FRANK W.—You must not take it for granted that phrenologists and physiognomists are exempt from the fallibilities of the human race in general, nor that their theories and systems are less free from errors than any other speculative systems and theories. Physiognomists assert that a dimple in the chin indicates benevolence, and a drooping nose avarice; yet Howard, the great philanthropist, had an undimpled chin, and his proboscis had a downward tendency. And do not the newspaper reporters frequently tell us of murderers with a "mild and prepossessing cast of countenance," and have not many of us known persons with a ludicrous expression who might, nevertheless, have been safely intrusted with uncounted gold?

F. C. H.—There is nothing about clairvoyance that may not be explained, when the absolute facts of any particular case of its exercises or exhibition have been ascertained. The trouble is, however, that the spectators and even honest, well-meaning operators and experimenters are almost invariably deluded by the phenomena (or, rather, what they accept as the phenomena) that are exhibited. Hence arise seeming indications of unfathomable mystery, of supernaturalism, and other similar bogeys. It may be laid down as a general truth that every one who "believes in clairvoyance," or who is capable of doing so, will permit himself to be deceived to an extent sufficient to justify his credulity; or, in other words, he will not make his investigation of the matter so unrelentingly searching as to induce a permanent state of disbelief in the supernaturalism of the supposed phenomena.

GEORGE M.—There is a popular belief that "the wind of a cannon ball" may be fatal to a person that the ball barely misses; but military authorities say that no one is ever hurt by the wind of a cannon ball, for the very sufficient reason that a cannon ball has no wind that strikes out sideways, as is commonly supposed. Cannon balls often pass between a soldier's legs, or knock off a soldier's cap, or take a button off of the breast of his coat, without inflicting the slightest personal injury; and there have been cases in which an ear or a nose has been taken off by a cannon ball, without further damage than the loss of the ear or nose occasioned. Men who are found dead on the field of battle, without the least mark of violence on their persons, die of the heart disease, apoplexy, or some similar fatal attack, and sometimes by being struck slightly over some vital spot by a cannon ball, which leaves no external mark on account of the yielding of the flesh, but the internal concussion from which was sufficient to destroy life. The internal organs of dead soldiers have been found smashed almost to a jelly, while not a sign of an external blow or scratch could be found on the body.

DELLA.—We do not know how generally the custom of drinking the "Grace Cup" is observed in Scotland now, or whether it is practised at all. The custom was once almost universal, wherever there was any beverage stronger than water to be had. The custom arose in the days of the pious queen of Malcolm Canmore, the son of Duncan, who regained his throne by defeating Macbeth, the murderer of his father. The queen, who was of English origin, had been brought up in the strictest observance of all the rites and ceremonies of religion; and she was, besides, an eminently religious and excellent lady. These qualities, combined with remarkable personal beauty, gave her great ascendancy over her brave but semi-barbaric husband, who permitted her to have the ordering of the royal household after her own heart. The queen soon had everything to her mind, except that the rude chieftains who feasted at the king's board would not tarry to hear the chaplain say grace after the meal. Bring a wise woman, she did not attempt to enforce compliance with her wishes in this regard, but always gave any of the chiefs that did remain until grace had been said a cup of choicest wine. This fact becoming known, the chieftains saw the impropriety of leaving the table while the chaplain was saying grace, and considerably remained to drink the cup of excellent wine, which never failed to be forthcoming on the occasion. The cup of wine thus served and drunk was naturally enough called the "Grace Cup," and the great lords, thinking the custom a pleasant one, introduced it at their own tables; the lesser chiefs followed their example; and finally it spread through all classes and conditions, and the "Grace Cup" became one of the institutions of the land.

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London: Published for the Proprietor, at 234, Strand, by J. R. SPECK; and Printed by WOODFALL and KINROSS, 70 to 73, Long Acre, W.C.